

## THE

# FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN

## INTRODUCTION

### § 1. *The authenticity of the Epistle.*

LITTLE need be said respecting the authenticity of this epistle, or the evidence that it was written by the apostle John. There are, in general, two sources of evidence in regard to ancient writings: the external evidence, or that which may be derived from the testimony of other writers; and the evidence which may be derived from some marks of the authorship in the writing itself, which is called the internal evidence. Both of these are remarkably clear in regard to this epistle.

(1.) The external evidence. (a) It is quoted or referred to by the early Christian writers as the undoubted production of the apostle John. It is referred to by Polycarp in the beginning of the second century; it is quoted by Papias, and also by Irenæus. Origen says, 'John, beside the Gospel and Revelation, has left us an epistle of a few lines. Grant also a second, and a third; for all do not allow these to be genuine.' See Lardner, vi. 275, and Lücke, Einlei. i. Dionysius of Alexandria admitted the genuineness of John's first epistle; so also did Cyprian. All the three epistles were received by Athanasius, by Cyril of Jerusalem, and by Epiphanius. Eusebius says, 'Beside his Gospel, his first epistle is universally acknowledged by those of the present time, and by the ancients; but the other two are contradicted.' (b) It is found in the old Syriac version, probably made in the first century, though the second and third epistles are not there. (c) The genuineness of the first epistle was never extensively called in question, and it was never reckoned among the doubtful or disputed epistles. (d) It was rejected or doubted only by those who rejected his Gospel, and for the same reasons. Some small sects of those who were called 'heretics,' rejected *all* the writings of John, because they conflicted with their peculiar views; but this was confined to a small number of persons, and never affected the general belief of the church. See Lücke, Einlei. 9, seq.

(2.) There is strong internal evidence that the same person wrote this epistle who was the author of the Gospel which bears the same name. The resemblance in the mode of expression, and in the topics referred to, are numerous, and at the same time are not such as would be made by one who was *attempting* to imitate the language of another. The allusions of this kind, moreover, are to what is *peculiar* in the Gospel of John, and not to what is common to that Gospel and the other three. There is nothing in the epistle which would particularly remind us of the Gospel of Matthew, or Mark, or Luke; but it is impossible to read it and not

be reminded constantly of the Gospel by John. Among those passages and expressions the following may be referred to:

EPISTLE.		GOSPEL.	
Chapter	i. 1 compared with	Chapter	i. 1, 4, 14.
ii. 5	.....	xiv.	23.
ii. 6	.....	xv.	4.
ii. 8; iii. 11	.....	xiii.	34.
ii. 8, 10	.....	i.	5, 9; xi. 10
ii. 13, 14	.....	xvii.	3.
iii. 1	.....	i.	12.
iii. 2	.....	xvii.	24.
iii. 8	.....	viii.	44.
iii. 13	.....	xv.	20.
iv. 9	.....	iii.	16.
iv. 12	.....	i.	18.
v. 13	.....	xx.	31.
v. 14	.....	xiv.	14.
v. 20	.....	xvii.	2.

This language in the epistle, as will be easily seen by a comparison, is such as the real author of the Gospel by John would be likely to use if he wrote an epistle. The passages referred to are in his style; they show that the mind of the author of both was turned to the same points, and those not such points as might be found in all writers, but such as indicated a peculiar mode of thinking. They are not such expressions as Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or Paul would have used in an epistle, but just such as we should expect from the writer of the Gospel of John. It must be clear to any one that either the author of the Gospel was also the author of this epistle, or that the author of the epistle *meant* to imitate the author of the Gospel, and to leave the impression that the apostle John was the author. But there are several things which make it clear that this is not a forgery. (a) The passages where the resemblance is found are not exact quotations, and are not such as a man would make if he *designed* to imitate another. They are rather such as the same man would use if he were writing twice on the same subject, and should express himself the second time without intending to copy what he had said the first. (b) If it had been an intentional fraud or forgery, there would have been some allusion to the name or authority of the author; or, in other words, the author of the epistle would have endeavoured to sustain himself by some distinct reference to the apostle, or to his authority, or to his well-known characteristics as a teller of truth. See John xix. 35; xxi. 24. Compare 3 John 12. But nothing of the kind occurs in this epistle. It is written without disclosing the name of the author, or the place where he lived, or the persons to whom it was addressed, and with no allusions to the Gospel, except such as show that the author thought in the same manner, and had the same things in his eye, and was intent on the same object. It is, throughout, the style and manner of one who felt that his method of expressing himself was so well understood, that he did not need even to mention his own name; as if, without anything further, it would be apparent from the very epistle itself who had written it, and what right he had to speak. But this would be a device too refined for forgery. It bears all the marks of sincerity and truth.

## § 2. *The time and place of writing the Epistle.*

Almost nothing is known of the time and place of writing the epistle, and nearly all that is said on this point is mere conjecture. Some recent critics have

supposed that it was in fact a part of the Gospel, though in some way it afterwards became detached from it; others, that it was sent *as an epistle* at the same time with the Gospel, and to the same persons. Some have supposed that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, and some long after, when John was very aged; and these last suppose that they find evidences of the very advanced age of the author in the epistle itself, in such characteristics as commonly mark the conversation and writings of an old man. An examination of these opinions may be found in Lücke, *Einlei.* Kap. 2; and in Hug, *Introduction*, p. 456, seq., p. 732, seq.

There are *very few* marks of time in the epistle, and none that can determine the time of writing it with any degree of certainty. Nor is it of much importance that we should be able to determine it. The truths which it contains are, in the main, as applicable to one age as to another, though it cannot be denied (see § 3) that the author had some prevailing forms of error in his eye. The only marks of time in the epistle by which we can form any conjecture as to the period when it was written are the following: (1.) It was in what the author calls *the last time*, (*ἡσχάτη ἔρα*.) ch. ii. 18. From this expression it might perhaps be inferred by some that it was just before the destruction of Jerusalem, or that the writer supposed that the end of the world was near. But nothing can be certainly determined from this expression in regard to the exact period when the epistle was written. This phrase, as used in the Scriptures, denotes no more than, the last dispensation or economy of things, the dispensation under which the affairs of the world would be wound up, though that period might be in fact much longer than any one that had preceded it. See Notes on Isa. ii. 2; Acts ii. 17; Heb. i. 2. The object of the writer of this epistle, in the passage referred to, (chap. ii. 18,) is merely to show that the closing dispensation of the world had actually come; that is, that there were certain things which it was known would mark that dispensation, which actually existed then, and by which it could be known that they were living under the last or closing period of the world. (2.) It is quite evident that the epistle was composed *after* the Gospel by John was published. Of this no one can have any doubt who will compare the two together, or even the parallel passages referred to above, § 1. The Gospel is manifestly the original; and it was evidently presumed by the writer of the epistle that the Gospel was in the hands of those to whom he wrote. The statements there made are much more full; the circumstances in which many of the peculiar doctrines adverted to were first advanced are detailed; and the writer of the epistle clearly supposed that all that was necessary in order to an understanding of these doctrines was to state them in the briefest manner, and almost by mere allusion. On this point Lücke well remarks, 'the more brief and condensed expression of the same sentiment by the same author, especially in regard to peculiarities of idea and language, is always the later one; the more extended statement, the unfolding of the idea, is an evidence of an earlier composition,' *Einlei.* p. 21. Yet while this is clear, it determines little or nothing about the time when the epistle was written, for it is a matter of great uncertainty when the Gospel itself was composed. Wetstein supposes that it was soon after the ascension of the Saviour; Dr. Lardner that it was about the year 68; and Mill and Le Clerc that it was about the year 97. In this uncertainty, therefore, nothing can be determined absolutely from this circumstance in regard to the time of writing the epistle. (3.) The only other note of time on which any reliance has been placed is the supposed fact that there were indications in the epistle itself of the *great age* of the author, or evidences that he was an old man, and that consequently it was written near the close of the life of John. There is some evidence in the epistle that it was written when the author was an old man, though none that he was in his *dotage*, as Eichhorn and some others have maintained. The evidence that he was even an old man is not positive, but there is a certain air and manner in the epistle, in its repetitions, and its want of exact order, and especially in the style in which he addresses those to whom he wrote, as *little children*—*ταῖς*—(chap. ii. 1, 12, 28; iii. 7,

18; iv. 4; v. 21)—which would seem to be appropriate only to an aged man. Comp. Lücke, *Einlei.* pp. 23, 25, and Stuart in Hug's Introduction, pp. 732, 733.

As little is known about the *place* where the epistle was written as about the *time*. There are no local references in it; no allusions to persons or opinions which can help us to determine where it was written. As John spent the latter part of his life, however, in Ephesus and its vicinity, there is no impropriety in supposing that it was written there. Nothing, in the interpretation of the epistle, depends on our being able to ascertain the place of its composition. Hug supposes that it was written in Patmos, and was sent as a letter accompanying his Gospel, to the church at Ephesus.—Intro. § 69. Lücke supposes that it was a circular epistle addressed to the churches in Asia Minor, and sent from Ephesus.—*Einlei.* p. 27.

To *whom* the epistle was written is also unknown. It bears no inscription, as many of the other epistles of the New Testament do, and as even the second and third of John do, and there is no reference to any particular class of persons by which it can be determined for whom it was designed. Nor is it known why the name of the author was not attached to it, or why the persons for whom it was designed were not designated. All that can be determined on this subject from the epistle itself is the following: (1.) It seems to have been addressed to no particular church, but rather to have been of a circular character, designed for the churches in a region of country where certain dangerous opinions prevailed. (2.) The author presumed that it would be known who wrote it, either by the style, or by the sentiments, or by its resemblance to his other writings, or by the messenger who bore it, so that it was unnecessary to affix his name to it. (3.) It appears to have been so composed as to be adapted to *any* people where those errors prevailed; and hence it was thought better to give it a *general* direction, that all might feel themselves to be addressed, than to designate any particular place or church. There is, indeed, an ancient tradition that it was written to the *Parthians*. Since the time of Augustine this has been the uniform opinion in the Latin church. Venerable Bede remarks, that 'many of the ecclesiastical writers, among whom is St. Athanasius, testify that the first epistle of John was written to the Parthians.' Various conjectures have been made as to the origin of this opinion, and of the title which the epistle bears in many of the Latin mss., (*ad Parthos*), but none of them are satisfactory. No such title is found in the epistle itself, nor is there any intimation in it to whom it was directed. Those who are disposed to examine the conjectures which have been made in regard to the origin of the title may consult Lücke, *Einlei.* p. 28, seq. No reason can be assigned why it should have been sent to the Parthians, nor is there any sufficient evidence to suppose that it was.

### § 3. *The object of the Epistle.*

It is evident from the epistle itself that there were some prevailing errors among those to whom it was written, and that one design of the writer was to counteract those errors. Yet very various opinions have been entertained in regard to the nature of the errors that were opposed, and the persons whom the writer had in his eye. Loeffler supposes that *Jews* and *Judaizers* are the persons opposed; Semler, Tittman, Knapp, and Lange suppose that they were *Judaizing Christians*, and especially *Ebionites*, or apostate Christians; Michaelis, Kleuker, Paulus, and others, suppose that the *Gnostics* are referred to; others, as Schmidt, Lücke, Vitringa, Bertholdt, Prof. Stuart, suppose that the *Docetæ* was the sect that was principally opposed.

It is impossible now to determine with accuracy to whom particularly the writer referred, nor could it be well done without a more accurate knowledge than we now have of the peculiarities of the errors which prevailed in the time of the author, and among the people to whom he wrote. All that we can learn on the

subject that is certain, is to be derived from the epistle itself; and there the intimations are few, but they are so clear that we may obtain some knowledge to guide us.

(1.) The persons referred to had been professing Christians, and were now apostates from the faith. This is clear from ch. ii. 19, 'They went out from us, but they were not of us,' &c. They had been members of the church, but they had now become teachers of error.

(2.) They were probably of the sect of the *Docetæ*; or if that sect had not then formally sprung up, and was not organized, they held the opinions which they afterwards embraced. This sect was a branch of the great Gnostic family; and the peculiarity of the opinion which they held was that Christ was only in appearance and seemingly, but not in reality, a man; that though he seemed to converse, to eat, to suffer, and to die, yet this was merely an *appearance* assumed by the Son of God for important purposes in regard to man. He had, according to this view, no *real humanity*; but though the Son of God had actually appeared in the world, yet all this was only an assumed form for the purpose of a manifestation to men. The opinions of the *Docetæ* are thus represented by Gibbon: 'They denied the truth and authenticity of the Gospels, as far as they relate the conception of Mary, the birth of Christ, and the thirty years which preceded the first exercise of his ministry. He first appeared on the banks of the Jordan in the form of perfect manhood; but it was a form only, and not a substance; a human figure created by the hand of Omnipotence to imitate the faculties and actions of a man, and to impose a perpetual illusion on the senses of his friends and enemies. Articulate sounds vibrated on the ears of his disciples; but the image which was impressed on their optic nerve, eluded the more stubborn evidence of the touch, and they enjoyed the spiritual, but not the corporeal presence of the Son of God. The rage of the Jews was idly wasted against an impassive phantom, and the mystic scenes of the passion and death, the resurrection and ascension of Christ, were represented on the theatre of Jerusalem for the benefit of mankind.'—Decl. and Fall, vol. iii. p. 245, Ed. New York, 1829. Comp. vol. i. 440.

That these views began to prevail in the latter part of the first century there can be no reason to doubt; and there can be as little doubt that the author of this epistle had this doctrine in his eye, and that he deemed it to be of special importance in this epistle, as he had done in his Gospel, to show that the Son of God had actually *come in the flesh*; that he was truly and properly a man; that he lived and died in reality, and not in appearance only. Hence the allusion to these views in such passages as the following: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and *our hands have handled*, of the Word of life—that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you,' chap. i. 1, 3. 'Many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know we the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ *is come in the flesh* is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come,' chap. iv. 1–3. Comp. vers. 9, 14, 15; v. 1, 6, 10–12. John had written his Gospel to show that Jesus was the Christ, (chap. xx. 31;) he had furnished ample proof that he was Divine, or was equal with the Father, (chap. i. 1–14,) and also that he was truly a man, (chap. xv. 25–28;) but still it seemed proper to furnish a more unequivocal statement that he had actually appeared *in the flesh*, not in appearance only but in reality, and this purpose evidently was a leading design of this epistle.

The main scope of the epistle the author has himself stated in chap. v. 13: 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God;' that is, that you may have just views of him, and exercise an intelligent faith.

In connection with this general design, and keeping in view the errors to which they to whom the epistle was written were exposed, there are two leading trains of thought, though often intermingled, in the epistle. (a) The author treats of the doctrine that Jesus is the Christ, and (b) the importance of *love* as an evidence of being united to him, or of being true Christians. Both these things are characteristic of John ; they agree with the design for which he wrote his gospel, and they were in accordance with his peculiarity of mind as 'the *beloved* disciple,' the disciple whose heart was full of love, and who made religion consist much in that.

The main characteristics of this epistle are these : (1.) It is full of love. The writer dwells on it ; places it in a variety of attitudes ; enforces the duty of loving one another by a great variety of considerations, and shows that it is essential to the very nature of religion. (2.) The epistle abounds with statements on the evidences of piety, or the characteristics of true religion. The author seems to have felt that those to whom he wrote were in danger of embracing false notions of religion, and of being seduced by the abettors of error. He is therefore careful to lay down the characteristics of real piety, and to show in what it essentially consists. A large part of the epistle is occupied with this, and there is perhaps no portion of the New Testament which one could study to more advantage who is desirous of ascertaining whether he himself is a true Christian. An anxious inquirer, a man who wishes to know what true religion is, could be directed to no portion of the New Testament where he would more readily find the instruction that he needs, than to this portion of the writings of the aged and experienced disciple whom Jesus loved. A true Christian can find nowhere else a more clear statement of the nature of his religion, and of the evidences of real piety, than in this epistle.

# THE

## FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN.

### CHAPTER I.

**T**HAT which was from the <sup>a</sup>beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen <sup>b</sup>with our eyes,

which we have looked upon, and our hands have <sup>c</sup>handled, of the Word of life ;

<sup>a</sup> Ju. i. 1, &c.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Pe. i. 16.

<sup>c</sup> Lu. 24. 39.

### CHAPTER I.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

THIS short chapter embraces the following subjects : I. A strong affirmation that the Son of God, or the 'Life,' had appeared in the flesh, vers. 1—3. The evidence of this, the writer says, was that he had seen him, heard him, handled him ; that is, he had had all the evidence which could be furnished by the senses. His declaration on this point he repeats, by putting the statement into a variety of forms, for he seems to regard it as essential to true religion. II. He says that he wrote to them, in order that they might have fellowship with him in the belief of this truth, and might partake of the joy which flows from the doctrine that the Son of God has actually come in the flesh, vers. 3, 4. III. He states that the sum and substance of the whole message which he had to bring to them was, that God is light, and that if we profess to have fellowship with him we must walk in the light, vers. 5—10. (a) In God is no darkness, no impurity, no sin, ver. 5. (b) If we are in darkness, if we are ignorant and sinful, it proves that we cannot have any fellowship with him, ver. 6. (c) If we walk in the light as he is in the light, if we partake of his character and spirit, then we shall have fellowship one with another, and we may believe that the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all sin, ver. 7. (d) Yet we are to guard ourselves from one point of danger, we are not to allow ourselves to feel that we have *no* sin. We are to bear with us the constant recollection that we are

sinners, and are to permit that fact to produce its proper impression on our minds, vers. 8, 10. (e) Yet we are not to be desponding though we do feel this, but are to remember, that if we will truly confess our sins he will be found faithful to his promises, and just to the general arrangements of grace, by which our sins may be forgiven, ver. 9.

1. *That which was from the beginning.* There can be no doubt that the reference here is to the Lord Jesus Christ, or the 'Word' that was made flesh. See Notes, John i. 1. This is such language as John would use respecting him, and indeed the phrase 'the beginning,' as applicable to the Lord Jesus, is peculiar to John in the writings of the New Testament : and the language here may be regarded as one proof that this epistle was written by him, for it is just such an expression as *he* would use, but not such as one would be likely to adopt who should attempt to palm off his own writings as those of John. One who should have attempted that would have been likely to introduce the name *John* in the beginning of the epistle, or in some way to have claimed his authority. The apostle, in speaking of '*that which was from the beginning*,' uses a word in the neuter gender instead of the masculine, (§.) It is not to be supposed, I think, that he meant to apply this term *directly* to the Son of God, for if he had he would have used the masculine pronoun ; but though he had the Son of God in view, and meant to make a strong affirmation respecting him, yet the particular thing here referred to was *whatever* there was respecting that

incarnate Saviour that furnished testimony to any of the senses, or that pertained to his character and doctrine, he had borne witness to. He was looking rather at the *evidence* that he was incarnate; the *proofs* that he was manifested; and he says that those proofs had been subjected to the trial of the senses, and he had borne witness to them, and now did it again. This is what is referred to, it seems to me, by the phrase 'that which,' (β.) The sense may be this: 'Whatever there was respecting the Word of life, or him who is the living Word, the incarnate Son of God, from the very beginning, from the time when he was first manifested in the flesh; whatever there was respecting his exalted nature, his dignity, his character, that could be subjected to the testimony of the senses, to be the object of sight, or hearing, or touch, *that* I was permitted to see, and that I declare to you respecting him.' John claims to be a competent witness in reference to everything which occurred as a *manifestation* of what the Son of God was. If this be the correct interpretation, then the phrase 'from the beginning' (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) does not here refer to his eternity, or his being in the beginning of all things, as the phrase 'in the beginning' (ἐν ἀρχῇ) does in John i. 1; but rather means from the very commencement of his *manifestation* as the Son of God, the very first indications on earth of what he was as the Messiah. When the writer says (ver. 3) that he 'declares' this to them, it seems to me that he has not reference merely to what he *would* say in this epistle, for he does not go extensively into it here, but that he supposes that they had his Gospel in their possession, and that he also means to refer to that, or presumes that they were familiar with the testimony which he had borne in that Gospel respecting the evidence that the 'Word became flesh.' Many have indeed supposed that this epistle accompanied the Gospel when it was published, and was either a part of it that became subsequently detached from it, or was a letter that accompanied it. See *Hug*, Intro. P. II. § 68. There is, it seems to me, no certain evidence of that; but no one can doubt

that he supposed that those to whom he wrote had access to that Gospel, and that he refers here to the testimony which he had borne in that respecting the incarnate Word. ¶ *Which we have heard.* John was with the Saviour through the whole of his ministry, and he has recorded more that the Saviour *said* than either of the other evangelists. It is on what he *said* of himself that he grounds much of the evidence that he was the Son of God. ¶ *Which we have seen with our eyes.* That is, pertaining to his person, and to what he did. 'I have seen *him*; seen what he was as a man; how he appeared on earth; and I have seen whatever there was in his works to indicate his character and origin.' John professes here to have seen enough in this respect to furnish evidence that he was the Son of God. It is not hearsay on which he relies, but he had the testimony of his own eyes in the case. Comp. Notes, 2 Pet. i. 16. ¶ *Which we have looked upon.* The word here used seems designed to be more emphatic or intensive than the one before occurring. He had just said that he had 'seen him with his eyes,' but he evidently designs to include an idea in this word which would imply something more than *mere* beholding or seeing. The additional idea which is couched in this word seems to be that of *desire* or *pleasure*; that is, that he had looked on him with desire, or satisfaction, or with the pleasure with which one beholds a beloved object. Comp. Matt. xi. 7; Luke vii. 24; John i. 14; x. 45. See *Rob. Lex.* There was an intense and earnest gaze, as when we behold one whom we have desired to see, or when one goes out purposely to look on an object. The evidences of the incarnation of the Son of God had been subjected to such an intense and earnest gaze. ¶ *And our hands have handled.* That is, the evidence that he was a *man* was subjected to the sense of *touch*. It was not merely that he had been seen by the eye, for then it might be pretended that this was a mere *appearance* assumed without reality; or that what occurred might have been a mere optical illusion; but the evidence that he appeared in the flesh was subjected to more senses than one; to the fact that



2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal

life, " which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

*a* Jn. 17. 3.

his voice was heard; that he was seen with the eyes; that the most intense scrutiny had been employed; and, lastly, that he had been actually *touched* and *handled*, showing that it could not have been a mere *appearance*, an assumed form, but that it was a reality. This kind of proof that the Son of God had appeared *in the flesh*, or that he was truly and properly a *man*, is repeatedly referred to in the New Testament. Luke xxiv. 39: 'Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.' Comp. John xx. 25-27. There is evident allusion here to the opinion which early prevailed, which was held by the *Docetes*, that the Son of God did not truly and really become a man, but that there was only an *appearance* assumed, or that he *seemed* to be a man. See the Intro., § 3. It was evidently with reference to this opinion, which began early to prevail, that the apostle dwells on this point, and repeats the idea so much, and shows by a reference to all the senses which could take any cognizance in the case, that he was truly and properly a man. The amount of it is, that we have the same evidence that he was properly a man which we can have in the case of any other human being; the evidence on which we constantly act, and in which we cannot believe that our senses deceive us. ¶ *Of the Word of life.* Respecting, or pertaining to, the Word of life. 'That is, whatever there was pertaining to the Word of life, which was manifested from the beginning in his speech and actions, of which the senses could take cognizance, and which would furnish the evidence that he was truly incarnate, that we have declared unto you.' The phrase 'the Word of life,' means the Word in which life resided, or which was the source and fountain of life. See Notes, John i. 1, 3. The reference is undoubtedly to the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. *For the life was manifested.* Was made manifest or visible unto us. He who was the life was made known to men by the incarnation. He appeared

among men so that they could see him and hear him. Though originally with God, and dwelling with him, (John i. 1, 2,) yet he came forth and appeared among men. Comp. Notes, Rom. i. 3; 1 Tim. iii. 16. He is the great source of all life, and he appeared on the earth, and we had an opportunity of seeing and knowing what he was. ¶ *And we have seen it.* This repetition, or turning over the thought, is designed to express the idea with emphasis, and is much in the manner of John. See John i. 1-3. He is particularly desirous of impressing on them the thought that he had been a personal *witness* of what the Saviour was, having had every opportunity of knowing it from long and familiar intercourse with him. ¶ *And bear witness.* We testify in regard to it. John was satisfied that his own character was known to be such that credit would be given to what he said. He felt that he was known to be a man of truth, and hence he never doubts that faith would be put in all his statements. See John xix. 35; xxi. 24; Rev. i. 2; 3 John 12. ¶ *And shew unto you that eternal life.* That is, we declare unto you what that life was—what was the nature and rank of him who was the life, and how he appeared when on earth. He here attributes *eternity* to the Son of God—implying that he had always been with the Father. ¶ *Which was with the Father.* Always before the manifestation on the earth. See John i. 1. 'The word was with God.' This passage demonstrates the pre-existence of the Son of God, and proves that he was eternal. Before he was manifested on earth he had an existence to which the word *life* could be applied, and that was *eternal*. He is the Author of eternal life to us. ¶ *And was manifested unto us.* In the flesh; as a man. He who was the *life* appeared unto men. The idea of John evidently is, (1,) that the Being here referred to was for ever with God; (2,) that it was proper before the incarnation that the word *life* should be given to him as descriptive of his nature; (3,) that there was a manifestation of

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us :

and truly our fellowship <sup>is</sup> with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

α Jn. 17. 21.

him who was thus called *life*, on earth; that he appeared among men; that he had a real existence here, and not a merely *assumed* appearance; and (4,) that the true characteristics of this incarnate Being could be borne testimony to by those who had seen him, and who had been long with him. This second verse should be regarded as a parenthesis.

3. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.* We announce it, or make it known unto you—referring either to what he purposes to say in this epistle, or more probably embracing *all* that he had written respecting him, and supposing that his Gospel was in their hands. He means to call their attention to *all* the testimony which he had borne on the subject, in order to counteract the errors which began to prevail. ¶ *That ye may have fellowship with us.* With us the apostles; with us who actually saw him, and conversed with him. That is, he wished that they might have the same belief, and the same hope, and the same joy which he himself had, arising from the fact that the Son of God had become incarnate, and had appeared among men. To 'have fellowship,' means to have anything *in common* with others; to partake of it; to share it with them, (see Notes, Acts ii. 42;) and the idea here is, that the apostle wished that they might *share* with him all the peace and happiness which resulted from the fact that the Son of God had appeared in human form in behalf of men. The *object* of the apostle in what he wrote was, that they might have the same views of the Saviour which he had, and partake of the same hope and joy. This is the true notion of *fellowship* in religion. ¶ *And truly our fellowship is with the Father.* With God the Father. That is, there was something *in common* with him and God; something of which he and God partook together, or which they shared. This cannot, of course, mean that his *nature* was the same as that of God, or that in *all things* he shared with God, or that in *anything* he was *equal* with God; but

it means that he partook, in some respects, of the feelings, the views, the aims, the joys which God has. There was a union in feeling, and affection, and desire, and plan, and this was to him a source of joy. He had an attachment to the same things, loved the same truth, desired the same objects, and was engaged in the same work; and the *consciousness* of this, and the *joy* which attended it, was what was meant by *fellowship*. Comp. Notes on 1 Cor. x. 16; 2 Cor. xii. 14. The fellowship which Christians have with God relates to the following points: (1.) Attachment to the same truths, and the same objects; love for the same principles, and the same beings. (2.) The same *kind* of happiness, though not in the same *degree*. The happiness of God is found in holiness, truth, purity, justice, mercy, benevolence. The happiness of the Christian is of the same kind that God has; the same kind that angels have; the same kind that he will himself have in heaven—for the joy of heaven is only that which the Christian has now, expanded to the utmost capacity of the soul, and freed from all that now interferes with it, and prolonged to eternity. (3.) Employment, or co-operation with God. There *is* a sphere in which God works alone, and in which we can have no co-operation, no fellowship with him. In the work of creation; in upholding all things; in the government of the universe; in the transmission of light from world to world; in the return of the seasons, the rising and setting of the sun, the storms, the tides, the flight of the comet, we can have no joint agency, no co-operation with him. There God works alone. But there is also a large sphere in which he admits us graciously to a co-operation with him, and in which, unless *we* work, his agency will not be put forth. This is seen when the farmer sows his grain; when the surgeon binds up a wound; when we take the medicine which God has appointed as a means of restoration to health. So in the moral world. In

4 And these things write we unto you, that <sup>a</sup>your joy may be full.

5 This then is the message which

a Jn. 15. 11.

our efforts to save our own souls and the souls of others, God graciously works with us; and unless *we* work, the object is not accomplished. This co-operation is referred to in such passages as these: 'We are labourers together (*συνεργοί*) with God,' 1 Cor. iii. 9. 'The Lord working *with them*,' Mark xvi. 20. 'We then as workers together with him,' 2 Cor. vi. 1. 'That we might be fellow-helpers to the truth,' 3 John 8. In all such cases, while the *efficiency* is of God—alike in exciting us to effort, and in crowning the effort with success—it is still true that if *our* efforts were not put forth, the work would not be done. In this department God would not work by himself alone; he would not secure the result by miracle. (4.) We have fellowship with God by direct communion with him, in prayer, in meditation, and in the ordinances of religion. Of this all true Christians are sensible, and this constitutes no small part of their peculiar joy. The nature of this, and the happiness resulting from it, is much of the same nature as the communion of friend with friend—of one mind with another kindred mind—that to which we owe no small part of our happiness in this world. (5.) The Christian will have fellowship with his God and Saviour in the triumphs of the latter day, when the scenes of the judgment shall occur, and when the Redeemer shall appear, that he may be admired and adored by assembled worlds. Comp. Notes, 2 Thess. i. 10. See also Matt. xix. 28; Rev. iii. 21. ¶ *And with his Son Jesus Christ.* That is, in like manner there is much which we have in common with the Saviour—in character, in feeling, in desire, in spirit, in plan. There is a *union* with him in these things—and the consciousness of this gives peace and joy.

[There is a *real* union between Christ and his people, which lies at the foundation of this fellowship. Without *this* union there can be no communion. But a 'union with Christ in these things, i. e., in character and feeling, &c.' is nothing more than the union which subsists

we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, <sup>b</sup>and in him is no darkness at all.

b Jn. 1. 4, 9; 1 Ti. 6. 16.

between any chief and his followers; and why the apostle Paul, or others after him, should reckon this a great mystery, is not easily comprehended. Eph. v. 32; Col. i. 27. For a full view of the subject, see the Author's Notes, with the Supplementary Note, Rom. viii. 10.]

4. *And these things write we unto you.* These things respecting him who was manifested in the flesh, and respecting the results which flow from that. ¶ *That your joy may be full.* This is almost the same language which the Saviour used when addressing his disciples as he was about to leave them, (John xv. 11;) and there can be little doubt that John had that declaration in remembrance when he uttered this remark. See Notes on that passage. The sense here is, that full and clear views of the Lord Jesus, and the fellowship with him and with each other, which would follow from that, would be a source of happiness. Their joy would be complete if they had that; for their real happiness was to be found in their Saviour. The best editions of the Greek Testament now read '*your joy*,' instead of the common reading '*our joy*.'

5. *This then is the message which we have heard of him.* This is the substance of the announcement (*ἀγγελία*) which we have received of him, or which he made to us. The *message* here refers to what he communicated as the sum of the revelation which he made to man. The phrase '*of him*' (*ἀπ' αὐτοῦ*) does not mean *respecting him*, or *about him*, but *from him*; that is, this is what we received from his preaching; from all that he said. The peculiarity, the substance of all that he said, may be summed up in the declaration that God is light, and in the consequences which follow from this doctrine. He came as the messenger of Him who is *light*; he came to inculcate and defend the truths which flow from that central doctrine, in regard to sin, to the danger and duty of man, to the way of recovery, and to the rules by which men ought to live. ¶ *That God is light.* Light, in the Scriptures, is the emblem of purity, truth, know-

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in

darkness, we lie, and do not the truth :

ledge, prosperity, and happiness—as darkness is of the opposite. John here says that ‘God is *light*’—*φῶς*,—not the light, or a light, but *light itself*; that is, he is himself all light, and is the source and fountain of light in all worlds. He is perfectly pure, without any admixture of sin. He has all knowledge, with no admixture of ignorance on any subject. He is infinitely happy, with nothing to make him miserable. He is infinitely true, never stating or countenancing error; he is blessed in all his ways, never knowing the darkness of disappointment and adversity. Comp. Notes on James i. 17; John i. 4, 5; 1 Tim. vi. 16. ¶ *And in him is no darkness at all.* This language is much in the manner of John, not only affirming that a thing is so, but guarding it so that no mistake could possibly be made as to what he meant. Comp. John i. 1–3. The expression here is designed to affirm that God is absolutely perfect; that there is nothing in him which is in any way imperfect, or which would dim or mar the pure splendour of his character, not even as much as the smallest spot would on the sun. The language is probably designed to guard the mind from an error to which it is prone, that of charging God with being the Author of the sin and misery which exist on the earth; and the apostle seems to design to teach that whatever was the source of sin and misery, it was not in any sense to be charged on God. This doctrine that God is a pure light, John lays down as the substance of all that he had to teach; of all that he had learned from him who was made flesh. It is, in fact, the fountain of all just views of truth on the subject of religion, and all proper views of religion take their origin from this.

6. *If we say that we have fellowship with him.* If we reckon ourselves among his friends, or, in other words, if we profess to be like him: for a profession of religion involves the idea of having *fellowship* with God, (comp. Notes on ver. 3,) and he who professes that should be like him. ¶ *And walk in darkness.* Live in sin and error. To ‘walk in darkness’ now commonly denotes to be

in doubt about our religious state, in contradistinction from living in the enjoyment of religion. That is not, however, probably the whole idea here. The leading thought is, that if we live in sin, it is a proof that our profession of religion is false. Desirable as it is to have the comforts of religion, yet it is not always true that they who do not are not true Christians, nor is it true by any means that they intend to deceive the world. ¶ *We lie.* We are false professors; we are deceived if we think that we can have fellowship with God, and yet live in the practice of sin. As God is pure, so must we be, if we would be his friends. This does not mean necessarily that they *meant* to deceive, but that there was an irreconcilable contradiction between a life of sin and fellowship with God. ¶ *And do not the truth.* Do not act truly. The profession is a false one. Comp. Notes on John iii. 22. *To do the truth* is to act in accordance with truth; and the expression here means that such an one could not be a Christian. And yet how many there are who are living in known sin who profess to be Christians! How many whose minds are dark on the whole subject of religion, who have never known anything of the real peace and joy which it imparts, who nevertheless entertain the belief that they are the friends of God, and are going to heaven! They trust in a name, in forms, in conformity to external rites, and have never known anything of the internal peace and purity which religion imparts, and in fact have never had any true fellowship with that God who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all. Religion is light; religion is peace, purity, joy; and though there are cases where for a time a true Christian may be left to darkness, and have no spiritual joy, and be in doubt about his salvation, yet still it is a great truth, that unless we know by personal experience what it is to walk habitually in the light, to have the comforts of religion, and to experience in our own souls the influences which make the heart pure, and which bring us into conformity to the God who

7 But if we walk <sup>a</sup>in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood <sup>b</sup> of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, <sup>c</sup>we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 12.35.

<sup>b</sup> Ep. 1.7; He. 9.14; 1 Pe. 1.19; Ro. 1.5.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Ki. 8.46; Job 25.4; Ec. 7.20; Ja. 3.3.

is light, we can have no true religion. All else is but a name, which will not avail us on the final day.

7. *But if we walk in the light.* Comp. Notes on ver. 5. Walking in the light may include the three following things: (1.) Leading lives of holiness and purity; that is, the Christian must be characteristically a holy man, a light in the world, by his example. (2.) Walking in the truth; that is, embracing the truth in opposition to all error of heathenism and infidelity, and having clear, spiritual views of truth, such as the unrenewed never have. See 2 Cor. iv. 6; 1 Cor. ii. 9-15; Eph. i. 18. (3.) Enjoying the comforts of religion; that is, having the joy which religion is fitted to impart, and which it does impart to its true friends, Psa. xciv. 19; Isa. lvii. 8; 2 Cor. i. 3; xiii. 11. Comp. Notes on John xii. 35. ¶ *As he is in the light.* In the same kind of light that he has. The measure of light which we may have is not the same in *degree*, but it is of the same *kind*. The true Christian in his character and feelings resembles God. ¶ *We have fellowship one with another.* As we all partake of his feelings and views, we shall resemble each other. Loving the same God, embracing the same views of religion, and living for the same ends, we shall of course have much that is *common* to us all, and thus shall have fellowship with each other. ¶ *And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* See the sentiment here expressed fully explained in the Notes on Heb. ix. 14. When it is said that his blood cleanses us from *all* sin, the expression must mean one of two things—either that it is through that blood that all past sin is forgiven, or that that blood will ultimately purify us from all transgression, and make us perfectly holy. The general meaning is plain, that in regard to any and every sin of which we may be conscious, there is efficacy in that blood to remove it, and to make us wholly pure.

There is no stain made by sin so deep that the blood of Christ cannot take it entirely away from the soul. The *connection* here, or the reason why this is introduced here, seems to be this: The apostle is stating the substance of the message which he had received, ver. 5. The first or leading part of it was, that God is light, and in him is no darkness, and that his religion requires that all his friends should resemble him by their walking in the light. Another, and a material part of the same message was, that provision was made in his religion for cleansing the soul from sin, and making it like God. No system of religion intended for man could be adapted to his condition which did not contain this provision, and this *did* contain it in the most full and ample manner. Of course, however, it is meant that that blood cleanses from all sin only on the conditions on which its efficacy can be made available to man—by repentance for the past, and by a cordial reception of the Saviour through faith.

8. *If we say that we have no sin.* It is not improbable that the apostle here makes allusion to some error which was then beginning to prevail in the church. Some have supposed that the allusion is to the sect of the Nicolaitanes, and to the views which they maintained, particularly that nothing was forbidden to the children of God under the gospel, and that in the freedom conferred on Christians they were at liberty to do what they pleased, Rev. ii. 6, 15. It is not certain, however, that the allusion is to them, and it is not necessary to suppose that there is reference to any particular sect that existed at that time. The object of the apostle is to show that it is implied in the very nature of the gospel that we are sinners, and that if, on any pretence, we denied that fact, we utterly deceived ourselves. In all ages there have been those who have attempted, on some pretence, to justify their conduct; who have felt that they

9 If we confess <sup>a</sup> our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our*

<sup>a</sup> Job 33.27,28; Ps.32.5; Pr.28.13.

sins, and to cleanse <sup>b</sup> us from all unrighteousness.

<sup>b</sup> Ps.51.2; 1 Co.6.11.

did not need a Saviour; who have maintained that they had a right to do what they pleased; or who, on pretence of being perfectly sanctified, have held that they live without the commission of sin. To meet these, and all similar cases, the apostle affirms that it is a great elementary truth, which on no pretence is to be denied, that we are all sinners. We are at all times, and in all circumstances, to admit the painful and humiliating truth that we are transgressors of the law of God, and that we need, even in our best services, the cleansing of the blood of Jesus Christ. The fair interpretation of the declaration here will apply not only to those who maintain that they have not been guilty of sin in the past, but also to those who profess to have become perfectly sanctified, and to live without sin. In any and every way, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. Compare Notes on James iii. 2. ¶ *We deceive ourselves.* We have wrong views about our character. This does not mean that the self-deception is wilful, but that it in fact exists. No man knows himself who supposes that in all respects he is perfectly pure. ¶ *And the truth is not in us.* On this subject. A man who should maintain that he had never committed sin, could have no just views of the truth in regard to himself, and would show that he was in utter error. In like manner, according to the obvious interpretation of this passage, he who maintains that he is wholly sanctified, and lives without any sin, shows that he is deceived in regard to himself, and that the truth, in this respect, is not in him. He may hold the truth on other subjects, but he does not on this. The very nature of the Christian religion supposes that we feel ourselves to be sinners, and that we should be ever ready to acknowledge it. A man who claims that he is absolutely perfect, that he is holy as God is holy, must know little of his own heart. Who, after all his reasoning on the subject, would dare to go out under the open heaven, at midnight, and lift up

his hands and his eyes towards the stars, and say that he had no sin to confess—that he was as pure as the God that made those stars?

9. *If we confess our sins.* Pardon in the Scriptures, always supposes that there is confession, and there is no promise that it will be imparted unless a full acknowledgment has been made. Compare Ps. li.; xxxii.; Luke xv. 18, seq.; vii. 41, seq.; Prov. xxviii. 13. ¶ *He is faithful.* To his promises. He will do what he has assured us he will do in remitting them. ¶ *And just to forgive us our sins.* The word *just* here cannot be used in a strict and proper sense, since the forgiveness of sins is never an act of *justice*, but is an act of *mercy*. If it were an act of justice it could be demanded or enforced, and that is the same as to say that it is not forgiveness, for in that case there could have been no sin to be pardoned. But the word *just* is often used in a larger sense, as denoting upright, equitable, acting properly in the circumstances of the case, &c. Comp. Notes on Matt. i. 19. Here the word may be used in one of the following senses: (1.) Either as referring to his general excellence of character, or his disposition to do what is proper; that is, he is one who will act in every way as becomes God; or, (2.) that he will be just in the sense that he will be true to his promises; or that, since he has *promised* to pardon sinners, he will be found faithfully to adhere to those engagements; or perhaps, (3.) that he will be just to his Son in the covenant of redemption, since, now that an atonement has been made by him, and a way has been opened through his sufferings by which God can consistently pardon, and with a view and an understanding that he might and would pardon, it would be an act of injustice to *him* if he did not pardon those who believe on him. Viewed in either aspect, we may have the fullest assurance that God is ready to pardon us if we exercise true repentance and faith. No one can come to God without finding him ready to do

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

all that is appropriate for a God to do in pardoning transgressors; no one who will not, in fact, receive forgiveness if he repents, and believes, and makes confession; no one who will not find that God is just to his Son in the covenant of redemption, in pardoning and saving all who put their trust in the merits of his sacrifice. ¶ *And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* By forgiving all that is past, treating us as if we were righteous, and ultimately by removing all the stains of guilt from the soul.

10. *If we say that we have not sinned.* In times that are past. Some perhaps might be disposed to say this; and as the apostle is careful to guard every point, he here states that if a man should take the ground that his past life had been wholly upright, it would prove that he had no true religion. The statement here respecting the *past* seems to prove that when, in ver. 8, he refers to the present—‘if we say we *have* no sin’—he meant to say that if a man should claim to be perfect, or to be wholly sanctified, it would demonstrate that he deceived himself; and the two statements go to prove that neither in reference to the past nor the present can any one lay claim to perfection. ¶ *We make him a liar.* Because he has everywhere affirmed the depravity of all the race. Compare Notes on Rom. i. ii. iii. On no point have his declarations been more positive and uniform than on the fact of the universal sinfulness of man. Comp. Gen. vi. 11, 12; Job xiv. 4; xv. 16; Psa. xiv. 1, 2, 3; li. 5; lviii. 3; Rom. iii. 9-20; Gal. iii. 21. ¶ *And his word is not in us.* His truth; that is, we have no true religion. The whole system of Christianity is based on the fact that man is a fallen being, and needs a Saviour; and unless a man admits that, of course he cannot be a Christian.

#### REMARKS.

(1.) The importance of the doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God, vers. 1, 2. On that doctrine the apostle lays great stress; begins his epistle

with it; presents it in a great variety of forms; dwells upon it as if he would not have it forgotten or misunderstood. It *has* all the importance which he attached to it, for (a) it is the most wonderful of all the events of which we have any knowledge; (b) it is the most deeply connected with our welfare.

(2.) The intense interest which true piety always takes in this doctrine, vers. 1, 2. The feelings of John on the subject are substantially the feelings of all true Christians. The world passes it by in unbelief, or as if it were of no importance; but no true Christian can look at the fact that the Son of God became incarnate but with the deepest emotion.

(3.) It is an object of ardent desire with true Christians that all others should share their joys, vers. 3, 4. There is nothing selfish, or narrow, or exclusive in true religion; but every sincere Christian who is happy desires that all others should be happy too.

(4.) Wherever there is true fellowship with God, there is with all true Christians, vers. 3, 4. There is but one church, one family of God; and as all true Christians have fellowship with God, they must have with each other.

(5.) Wherever there is true fellowship with Christians, there is with God himself, vers. 3, 4. If we love his people, share their joys, labour with them in promoting his cause, and love the things which they love, we shall show that we love him. There is but one God, and one church; and if all the members love each other, they will love their common God and Saviour. An evidence, therefore, that we love Christians, becomes an evidence that we love God.

(6.) It is a great privilege to be a Christian, vers. 3, 4. If we are Christians, we are associated with (a) God the Father; (b) with his Son Jesus Christ; (c) with all his redeemed on earth and in heaven; (d) with all holy angels. There is one bond of fellowship that unites all together; and what a privilege it is to be united in the eternal

bonds of friendship with all the holy minds in the universe !

(7.) If God is *light*, (ver. 5,) then all that occurs is reconcilable with the idea that he is worthy of confidence. What he does may *seem* to be dark to us, but we may be assured that it is all light with him. A cloud may come between us and the sun, but beyond the cloud the sun shines with undimmed splendour, and soon the cloud itself will pass away. At midnight it is dark to us, but it is not because the sun is shorn of his beams, or is extinguished. He will rise again upon our hemisphere in the fulness of his glory, and all the darkness of the cloud and of midnight is reconcilable with the idea that the sun is a bright orb, and that in him is no darkness at all. So with God. We may be under a cloud of sorrow and of trouble, but above that the glory of God shines with splendour, and soon that cloud will pass away, and reveal him in the fulness of his beauty and truth.

(8.) We should, therefore, at all times exercise a cheerful confidence in God, ver. 5. Who supposes that the sun is never again to shine when the cloud passes over it, or when the shades of midnight have settled down upon the world? We confide in that sun that it will shine again when the cloud has passed off, and when the shades of night have been driven away. So let us confide in God, for with more absolute certainty we shall yet see him to be light, and shall come to a world where there is no cloud.

(9.) We may look cheerfully onward to heaven, ver. 5. There all is light. There we shall see God as he is. Well may we then bear with our darkness a little longer, for soon we shall be ushered into a world where there is no need of the sun or the stars; where there is no darkness, no night.

(10.) Religion is elevating in its nature, vers. 6, 7. It brings us from a world of darkness to a world of light. It scatters the rays of light on a thousand dark subjects, and gives promise that all that is now obscure will yet become clear as noonday. Wherever there is true religion, the mind emerges more and more into light; the scales of ignorance and error pass away.

(11.) There is no sin so great that it may not be removed by the blood of the atonement, ver. 7, *last clause*. This blood has shown its efficacy in the pardon of all the great sinners who have applied to it, and its efficacy is as great now as it was when it was applied to the first sinner that was saved. No one, therefore, however great his sins, need hesitate about applying to the blood of the cross, or fear that his sins are so great that they cannot be taken away.

(12.) The Christian will yet be made wholly pure, ver. 7, *last clause*. It is of the nature of that blood which the Redeemer shed that it ultimately cleanses the soul entirely from sin. The prospect before the true Christian that he will become perfectly holy is absolute; and whatever else may befall him, he is sure that he will yet be holy as God is holy.

(13.) There is no use in attempting to conceal our offences, ver. 8. They are known, all known, to one Being, and they will at some future period all be disclosed. We cannot hope to evade punishment by hiding them; we cannot hope for impunity because we suppose they may be passed over *as if* unobserved. No man can escape on the presumption either that his sins are unknown, or that they are unworthy of notice.

(14.) It is manly to make confession when we have sinned, vers. 9, 10. All *meanness* was in doing the wrong, not in confessing it; what we should be ashamed of is that we are guilty, not that confession is to be made. When a wrong has been done, there is no nobleness in trying to conceal it; and as there is no nobleness in such an attempt, so there could be no safety.

(15.) Peace of mind, when wrong has been done, can be found only in confession, vers. 9, 10. That is what nature prompts to when we have done wrong, if we would find peace, and that the religion of grace demands. When a man has done wrong, the least that he can do is to make confession; and when that is done and the wrong is pardoned, all is done that *can* be to restore peace to the soul.

(16.) The *ease* of salvation, ver. 9. What more easy terms of salvation could we desire than an acknowledgment of



## CHAPTER II.

**MY** little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin

not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate <sup>a</sup> with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous :

<sup>a</sup> Ro.8.34; He.7.25.

our sins? No painful sacrifice is demanded; no penance, pilgrimage, or voluntary scourging; all that is required is that there should be an acknowledgment of sin at the foot of the cross, and if this is done with a true heart the offender will be saved. If a man is not *willing* to do this, why should he be saved? How can he be?

## CHAPTER II.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

THE *subjects* which are introduced into this chapter are the following : I. A statement of the apostle that the great object which he had in writing to them was that they should not sin; and yet if they sinned, and were conscious that they were guilty before God, they should not despair, for they had an Advocate with the Father who had made propitiation for the sins of the world, vers. 1, 2. This is properly a continuation of what he had said in the close of the previous chapter, and should not have been separated from that. II. The evidence that we know God, or that we are his true friends, is to be found in the fact that we keep his commandments, vers. 3-6. III. The apostle says that what he had been saying was no new commandment, but was what they had always heard concerning the nature of the gospel; but though in this respect the law of love which he meant particularly to enforce was no new commandment, none which they had not heard before, yet in another respect it *was* a new commandment, for it was one which in its peculiarity was originated by the Saviour, and which he meant to make the characteristic of his religion, vers. 7-11. A large part of the epistle is taken up in explaining and enforcing this commandment requiring love to the brethren. IV. The apostle specifies (vers. 12-14) various reasons why he had written to them—reasons derived from the peculiar character of different classes among them—little children, fathers, young men. V. Each of these classes he solemnly commands not to love

the world, or the things that are in the world, for that which constitutes the peculiarity of the 'world' as such is not of the Father, and all 'that there is in the world is soon to pass away,' vers. 15-17. VI. He calls their attention to the fact that the closing dispensation of the world had come, vers. 18-20. The evidence of this was, that antichrist had appeared. VII. He calls their attention to the characteristics of the antichrist. The essential thing would be that antichrist would deny that Jesus was the Christ, involving a practical denial of both the Father and the Son. Persons of this character were abroad, and they were in great danger of being seduced by their arts from the way of truth and duty, vers. 21-26. VIII. The apostle, in the close of the chapter, (vers. 27-29,) expresses the belief that they would not be seduced, but that they had an anointing from above which would keep them from the arts of those who would lead them astray. He earnestly exhorts them to abide in God the Saviour, that when he should appear they might have confidence and not be ashamed at his coming.

1. *My little children.* *Τίτλην μου.* This is such language as an aged apostle would be likely to use when addressing a church, and its use in this epistle may be regarded as one evidence that John had reached an advanced period of life when he wrote the epistle. ¶ *These things write I unto you.* To wit, the things stated in chap. i. ¶ *That ye sin not.* To keep you from sin, or to induce you to lead a holy life. ¶ *And if any man sin.* As all are liable, with hearts as corrupt as ours, and amidst the temptations of a world like this, to do. This, of course, does not imply that it is *proper* or *right* to sin, or that Christians should have no concern about it; but the meaning is, that all are liable to sin, and when we are conscious of sin the mind should not yield to despondency and despair. It *might* be supposed, perhaps, that if one sinned after baptism, or after being converted, there could be

no forgiveness. The apostle designs to guard against any such supposition, and to show that the atonement made by the Redeemer had respect to all kinds of sin, and that under the deepest consciousness of guilt and of personal unworthiness, we may feel that we have an advocate on high. ¶ *We have an advocate with the Father.* God only can forgive sin; and though we have no claim on him, yet there is one with him who can plead our cause, and on whom we can rely to manage our interests there. The word rendered *advocate* (παράκλητος—*paraclete*) is elsewhere applied to the Holy Spirit, and is in every other place where it occurs in the New Testament rendered *comforter*, John xiv. 16, 26; xv. 26; xvi. 7. On the meaning of the word, see Notes on John xiv. 16. As used with reference to the Holy Spirit (John xiv. 16, *et al.*) it is employed in the more general sense of *helper*, or *aid*; and the particular manner in which the Holy Spirit aids us, may be seen stated in the Notes on John xiv. 16. As usual here with reference to the Lord Jesus, it is employed in the more limited sense of the word *advocate*, as the word is frequently used in the Greek writers to denote an advocate in court; that is, one whom we *call to our aid*; or *to stand by us*, to defend our suit. Where it is applied to the Lord Jesus, the language is evidently figurative, since there can be no *literal* pleading for us in heaven; but it is expressive of the great truth that he has undertaken our cause with God, and that he performs for us all that we expect of an advocate and counsellor. It is not to be supposed, however, that he manages our cause in the same way, or on the same principles on which an advocate in a human tribunal does. An advocate in court is employed to *defend* his client. He does not begin by admitting his guilt, or in any way basing his plea on the conceded fact that he is guilty; his proper business is to show that he is *not* guilty, or, if he be proved to be so, to see that no injustice shall be done him. The proper business of an advocate in a human court, therefore, embraces two things: (1.) To show that his client is not guilty in the form and manner charged on him.

This he may do in one of two ways, either, (a) by showing that he did not do the act charged on him, as when he is charged with murder, and can prove an *alibi*, or show that he was not present at the time the murder was committed; or (b) by proving that he had a *right* to do the deed—as, if he is charged with murder, he may admit the fact of the killing, but may show that it was in self-defence. (2.) In case his client is convicted, his office is to see that no injustice is done to him in the sentence; to stand by him still; to avail himself of all that the law allows in his favour, or to state any circumstance of age, or sex, or former service, or bodily health, which would in any way mitigate the sentence. The advocacy of the Lord Jesus in our behalf, however, is wholly different from this, though the same general object is pursued and sought, the good of those for whom he becomes an advocate. The nature of his advocacy may be stated in the following particulars: (1.) He admits the guilt of those for whom he becomes the advocate, to the full extent charged on them by the law of God, and by their own consciences. He does not attempt to hide or conceal it. He makes no apology for it. He neither attempts to deny the *fact*, nor to show that they had a *right* to do as they have done. He could not do this, for it would not be true; and any plea before the throne of God which should be based on a denial of our guilt would be fatal to our cause. (2.) As our advocate, he undertakes to be security that no wrong shall be done to the universe if we are *not* punished as we deserve; that is, if we are pardoned, and treated *as if* we had not sinned. This he does by pleading what he has done in behalf of men; that is, by the plea that his sufferings and death in behalf of sinners have done as much to honour the law, and to maintain the truth and justice of God, and to prevent the extension of apostasy, as if the offenders themselves had suffered the full penalty of the law. If sinners are punished in hell, there will be some object to be accomplished by it; and the simple account of the atonement by Christ is, that his death will secure all the good results to the uni-

2 And he is the propitiation<sup>a</sup> for our sins: and not for ours only,

<sup>a</sup> Ro. 3.25.

but also for *the sins* of the whole world.

verse which would be secured by the punishment of the offender himself. It has done as much to maintain the honour of the law, and to impress the universe with the truth that sin cannot be committed with impunity. If all the good results can be secured by substituted sufferings which there would be by the punishment of the offender himself, then it is clear that the guilty may be acquitted and saved. Why should they not be? The Saviour, as our advocate, undertakes to be security that this shall be. (3.) As our advocate, he becomes a *surety* for our good behaviour; gives a pledge to justice that we will obey the laws of God, and that he will keep us in the paths of obedience and truth; that, if pardoned, we will not continue to rebel. This pledge or surety can be given in no human court of justice. No man, advocate or friend, can give security when one is pardoned who has been convicted of stealing a horse, that he will not steal a horse again; when one who has been guilty of murder is pardoned, that he will never be guilty of it again; when one who has been guilty of forgery is pardoned, that he will not be guilty of it again. If he *could* do this, the subject of pardon would be attended with much fewer difficulties than it is now. But the Lord Jesus becomes such a pledge or surety for us, (Heb. vii. 22,) and hence he becomes such an advocate with the Father as we need. ¶ *Jesus Christ the righteous.* One who is eminently righteous himself, and who possesses the means of rendering others righteous. It is an appropriate feeling when we come before God in his name, that we come pleading the merits of one who is eminently righteous, and on account of whose righteousness we may be justified and saved.

2. *And he is the propitiation for our sins.* The word rendered *propitiation* (*ἱλασμός*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, except in chap. iv. 10 of this epistle; though words of the same derivation, and having the same essential meaning, frequently occur.

The corresponding word *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilasterion*) occurs in Rom. iii. 25, rendered *propitiation*—‘whom God hath set forth to be a *propitiation* through faith in his blood;’ and in Heb. ix. 5, rendered *mercy-seat*—‘shadowing the *mercy-seat*.’ The verb *ἱλάσκομαι* (*hilas-komai*) occurs also in Luke xviii. 3—‘God be *merciful* to me a sinner;’ and Heb. ii. 17—‘to make *reconciliation* for the sins of the people.’ For the idea expressed by these words, see Notes on Rom. iii. 25. The proper meaning of the word is that of reconciling, appeasing, turning away anger, rendering propitious or favourable. The idea is, that there is anger or wrath, or that something has been done to offend, and that it is needful to turn away that wrath, or to appease. This may be done by a sacrifice, by songs, by services rendered, or by bloody offerings. So the word is often used in Homer.—*Passow.* We have similar words in common use, as when we say of one that he has been offended, and that something must be done to appease him, or to turn away his wrath. This is commonly done with us by making restitution; or by an acknowledgment; or by yielding the point in controversy; or by an expression of regret; or by different conduct in time to come. But this idea must not be applied too literally to God; nor should it be explained away. The essential thoughts in regard to him, as implied in this word, are, (1,) that his will has been disregarded, and his law violated, and that he has reason to be offended with us; (2,) that in that condition he cannot, consistently with his perfections, and the good of the universe, treat us as if we had not done it; (3,) that it is proper that, in some way, he should show his displeasure at our conduct, either by punishing us, or by something that shall answer the same purpose; and, (4,) that the means of propitiation come in here, and accomplish this end, and make it proper that he should treat us as if we had not sinned; that is, he is reconciled, or ap-

peased, and his anger is turned away. This is done, it is supposed, by the death of the Lord Jesus, accomplishing, in most important respects, what would be accomplished by the punishment of the offender himself. In regard to this, in order to a proper understanding of what is accomplished, it is necessary to observe two things—what is *not* done, and what *is*. I. There are certain things which do *not* enter into the idea of propitiation. They are such as these: (a) That it does not change the fact that the wrong was done. That is a fact which cannot be denied, and he who undertakes to make a propitiation for sin does not deny it. (b) It does not change God; it does not make him a different being from what he was before; it does not *buy him over* to a willingness to show mercy; it does not change an inexorable being to one who is compassionate and kind. (c) The offering that is made to secure reconciliation does not necessarily produce reconciliation in fact. It prepares the way for it on the part of God, but whether they for whom it is made will be disposed to accept it is another question. When two men are alienated from each other, you may go to B and say to him that all obstacles to reconciliation on the part of A are removed, and that he is disposed to be at peace, but whether B will be willing to be at peace is quite another matter. The mere fact that his adversary is disposed to be at peace, determines nothing in regard to his disposition in the matter. So in regard to the controversy between man and God. It may be true that all obstacles to reconciliation on the part of God are taken away, and still it may be quite a separate question whether man will be willing to lay aside his opposition, and embrace the terms of mercy. In itself considered, one does not necessarily determine the other, or throw any light on it. II. The amount, then, in regard to the propitiation made for sin is, that it removes all obstacles to reconciliation on the part of God; it does whatever is necessary to be done to maintain the honour of his law, his justice, and his truth; it makes it consistent for him to offer pardon—that is, it removes whatever there was that made it necessary to inflict punish-

ment, and thus, so far as the word can be applied to God, it appeases him, or turns away his anger, or renders him propitious. This it does, not in respect to producing any *change* in God, but in respect to the fact that it removes whatever there was in the nature of the case that prevented the free and full offer of pardon. The idea of the apostle in the passage before us is, that when we sin we may be assured that this has been done, and that pardon may now be freely extended to us. ¶ *And not for our's only.* Not only for the sins of us who are Christians, for the apostle was writing to such. The idea which he intends to convey seems to be, that when we come before God we should take the most liberal and large views of the atonement; we should feel that the most ample provision has been made for our pardon, and that in no respect is there any limit as to the sufficiency of that work to remove *all* sin. It is sufficient for us; sufficient for all the world. ¶ *But also for the sins of the whole world.* The phrase '*the sins of*' is not in the original, but is not improperly supplied, for the connection demands it. This is one of the expressions occurring in the New Testament which demonstrate that the atonement was made for all men, and which cannot be reconciled with any other opinion. If he had died only for a part of the race, this language *could not* have been used. The phrase, '*the whole world*,' is one which naturally embraces all men; is such as would be used if it be supposed that the apostle *meant* to teach that Christ died for all men; and is such as cannot be explained on any other supposition. If he died only for the elect, it is not true that he is the '*propitiation for the sins of the whole world*' in any proper sense, nor would it be possible then to assign a sense in which it could be true. This passage, interpreted in its plain and obvious meaning, teaches the following things: (1.) That the atonement in its own nature is *adapted* to all men, or that it is as much fitted to one individual, or one class, as another; (2.) that it is *sufficient* in merit for all; that is, that if any more should be saved than actually will be, there would be no need of any additional suffering in order to save

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep <sup>a</sup>his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

<sup>a</sup> Lu. 6.46; Jn. 14.15, 23.

them; (3,) that it has no *special* adapt-  
edness to one person or class more than  
another; that is, that in its own nature  
it did not render the salvation of one  
more easy than that of another. It so  
magnified the law, so honoured God, so  
fully expressed the Divine sense of the  
evil of sin in respect to all men, that the  
offer of salvation might be made as  
freely to one as to another, and that any  
and all might take shelter under it and  
be safe. Whether, however, God might  
not, for wise reasons, resolve that its  
benefits should be applied to a part only,  
is another question, and one which does  
not affect the inquiry about the intrinsic  
nature of the atonement. On the  
evidence that the atonement was made  
for all, see Notes on 2 Cor. v. 14, and  
Heb. ii. 9.

[See also the Supplementary Notes on these  
passages, for a general review of the argument  
regarding the extent of atonement.]

3. *And hereby we do know that we know him.* To wit, by that which follows, we have evidence that we are truly acquainted with him, and with the requirements of his religion; that is, that we are truly his friends. The word *him*, in this verse, seems to refer to the Saviour. On the meaning of the word *know*, see Notes, John xvii. 3. The apostle had stated in the previous part of this epistle some of the leading points revealed by the Christian religion, and he here enters on the consideration of the nature of the evidence required to show that we are personally interested in it, or that we are true Christians. A large part of the epistle is occupied with this subject. The first, the grand evidence—that without which all others would be vain—he says is, that we keep his commandments. ¶ *If we keep his commandments.* See Notes, John xiv. 15. Comp. John xiv. 23, 24; xv. 10, 14.

4. *He that saith, I know him.* He

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith, he abideth <sup>b</sup>in him, ought himself also so to walk, <sup>c</sup>even as he walked.

<sup>b</sup> Jn. 15.4, 5.

<sup>c</sup> Jn. 13.15.

who professes to be acquainted with the Saviour, or who professes to be a Christian. ¶ *And keepeth not his commandments.* What he has appointed to be observed by his people; that is, he who does not *obey* him. ¶ *Is a liar.* Makes a false profession; professes to have that which he really has not. Such a profession is a falsehood, because there can be no true religion where one does not obey the law of God.

5. *But whoso keepeth his word.* That is, what he has spoken or commanded. The term *word* here will include all that he has made known to us as his will in regard to our conduct. ¶ *In him verily is the love of God perfected.* He professes to have the love of God in his heart, and that love receives its *completion* or *filling up* by obediences to the will of God. That obedience is the proper carrying out, or the exponent of the love which exists in the heart. Love to the Saviour would be defective without that, for it is never complete without obedience. If this be the true interpretation, then the passage does not make any affirmation about sinless *perfection*, but it only affirms that if true love exists in the heart, it will be carried out in the life; or that love and obedience are parts of the same thing; that one will be manifested by the other; and that where obedience exists, it is the completion or perfecting of love. Besides, the apostle does not say that either the love or the obedience would be in themselves absolutely perfect; but he says that one cannot fully develop itself without the other. ¶ *Hereby know we that we are in him.* That is, by having in fact such love as shall insure obedience. To be *in* him, is to be united to him; to be his friends. Comp. Notes, John vi. 56; Rom. xiii. 14.

6. *He that saith, he abideth in him.* Gr., *remains* in him; that is, abides or

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which ye had from the beginning. The old command-

remains in the belief of his doctrines, and in the comfort and practice of religion. The expression is one of those which refer to the intimate union between Christ and his people. A great variety of phrase is employed to denote that. For the meaning of this word in John, see Notes, chap. iii. 6. ¶ *Ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.* Ought to live and act as he did. If he is *one* with him, or professes to be united to him, he ought to imitate him in all things. Comp. John xiii. 15. See also Notes, chap. i. 6.

7. *Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you.* That is, what I am now enjoining is not new. It is the same doctrine which you have always heard. There has been much difference of opinion as to what is referred to by the word *commandment*, whether it is the injunction in the previous verse to live as Christ lived, or whether it is what he refers to in the following verses, the duty of brotherly love. Perhaps neither of these is exactly the idea of the apostle, but he may mean in this verse to put in a *general* disclaimer against the charge that what he enjoined was *new*. In respect to *all* that he taught, the views of truth which he held, the duties which he enjoined, the course of life which he would prescribe as proper for a Christian to live, he meant to say that it was not at all *new*; it was nothing which he had originated himself, but it was in fact the same system of doctrines which they had always received since they became Christians. He might have been induced to say this because he apprehended that some of those whom he had in his eye, and whose doctrines he meant to oppose, might say that this was all new; that it was not the nature of religion as it had been commonly understood, and as it was laid down by the Saviour. In a somewhat different sense, indeed, he admits (ver. 8) that there was a 'new' commandment which it was proper to enjoin—for he did not forget that the Saviour himself called that 'new;' and

ment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new <sup>a</sup> commandment

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 13.34.

though that commandment had also been all along inculcated under the gospel, yet there was a sense in which it was proper to call *that* new, for it had been so called by the Saviour. But in respect to *all* the doctrines which he maintained, and in respect to *all* the duties which he enjoined, he said that they were not new in the sense that he had originated them, or that they had not been enjoined from the beginning. Perhaps, also, the apostle here may have some allusion to false teachers who were in fact scattering new doctrines among the people, things before unheard of, and attractive by their novelty; and he may mean to say that *he* made no pretensions to any such novelty, but was content to repeat the old and familiar truths which they had always received. Thus, if *he* was charged with broaching new opinions, he denies it fully; if *they* were advancing new opinions, and were even 'making capital' out of them, he says that he attempted no such thing, but was content with the old and established opinions which they had always received. ¶ *But an old commandment.* Old, in the sense that it has always been inculcated; that religion has always enjoined it. ¶ *Which ye had from the beginning.* Which you have always received ever since you heard anything about the gospel. It was preached when the gospel was first preached; it has always been promulgated when that has been promulgated; it is what you first heard when you were made acquainted with the gospel. Compare Notes, chap. i. 1. ¶ *The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.* Is the doctrine; or is what was enjoined. John is often in the habit of putting a truth in a new form or aspect in order to make it emphatic, and to prevent the possibility of misapprehension. See John i. 1, 2. The sense here is. All that I am saying to you is in fact an old commandment, or one which you have always had. There is nothing new in what I am enjoining on you.

8. *Again, a new commandment* I

I write unto you; which thing is true in him and in you, because the darkness <sup>a</sup> is past, and the true light now shineth.

9 He that saith he is in the light,

<sup>a</sup> Ro. 13. 12.

write unto you. 'And yet, that which I write to you, and particularly enjoin on you, deserves in another sense to be called a new commandment, though it has been also inculcated from the beginning, for it was called *new* by the Saviour himself.' Or the meaning may be, 'In addition to the general precepts which I have referred to, I do now call your attention to the *new* commandment of the Saviour, that which he himself called *new*.' There can be no doubt here that John refers to the commandment to 'love one another,' (see vers. 9-11,) and that it is here called *new*, not in the sense that John inculcated it as a novel doctrine, but in the sense that the Saviour called it such. For the reasons why it was so called by him, see Notes, John xiii. 34. ¶ *Which thing is true in him.* In the Lord Jesus. That is, which commandment or law of love was illustrated in him, or was manifested by him in his intercourse with his disciples. That which was most prominent in him was this very love which he enjoined on all his followers. ¶ *And in you.* Among you. That is, you have manifested it in your intercourse with each other. It is not new in the sense that you have never heard of it, and have never evinced it, but in the sense only that he called it new. ¶ *Because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.* The ancient systems of error, under which men hated each other, have passed away, and you are brought into the light of the true religion. Once you were in darkness, like others; now the light of the pure gospel shines around you, and that requires, as its distinguishing characteristic, *love*. Religion is often represented as *light*; and Christ spoke of himself, and was spoken of, as the light of the world. See Notes, John i. 4, 5. Comp. John viii. 12; xii. 35, 36, 46; Isa. ix. 2.

9. *He that saith he is in the light.* That he has true religion, or is a Christian. See chap. i. 7. ¶ *And hateth his*

and hateth his brother, is in darkness <sup>b</sup> even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none <sup>c</sup> occasion of stumbling in him.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Pe. 1. 9.

<sup>c</sup> scandal.

brother. The word *brother* seems here to refer to those who professed the same religion. The word is indeed sometimes used in a larger sense, but the reference here appears to be to that which is properly brotherly love among Christians. Comp. Lücke, *in loc.* ¶ *Is in darkness even until now.* That is, he cannot have true religion unless he has love to the brethren. The command to love one another was one of the most solemn and earnest which Christ ever enjoined, (John xv. 17;) he made it the peculiar badge of discipleship, or that by which his followers were to be everywhere known, (John xiii. 35;) and it is, therefore, impossible to have any true religion without love to those who are sincerely and truly his followers. If a man has not that, he is in deep darkness, whatever else he may have, on the whole subject of religion. Comp. Notes, 1 Thess. iv. 9.

10. *He that loveth his brother abideth in the light.* Has true religion, and enjoys it. ¶ *And there is none occasion of stumbling in him.* Marg., scandal. Greek, 'and there is no stumbling' [or scandal—*σκανδαλον*—in him.] The word here used, means anything against which one strikes or stumbles; and then a stumbling-block, an impediment, or anything which occasions a fall. Then it is used in a moral or spiritual sense, as denoting that which is the occasion of falling into sin. See Notes, Matt. v. 29, and Rom. xiv. 13. Here it refers to an individual in respect to his treatment of others, and means that there is nothing, so far as he is concerned, to lead him into sin.—*Rob. Lex.* If he has love to the brethren, he has true religion; and there is, so far as the influence of this shall extend, nothing that will be the occasion of his falling into sin in his conduct towards them, for 'love worketh no ill to his neighbour,' Rom. xiii. 10. His course will be just, and upright, and benevolent. He will have no envy towards them in their

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh<sup>a</sup> in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his<sup>b</sup> name's sake.

<sup>a</sup> Pr. 4.15; Jn. 12.35.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. 25.11; Lu. 24.47; Ac. 10.43.

prosperity, and will not be disposed to detract from their reputation in adversity; he will have no feelings of exultation when they fall, and will not be disposed to take advantage of their misfortunes; and, loving them as brethren, he will be in no respect under temptation to do them wrong. In the bosom of one who loves his brother, the baleful passions of envy, malice, hatred, and uncharitableness, can have no place. At the same time, this love of the brethren would have an important effect on his whole Christian life and walk, for there are few things that will have more influence on a man's character in keeping him from doing wrong, than the love of the good and the pure. He who truly loves good men, will not be likely in any respect to go astray from the paths of virtue.

11. *But he that hateth his brother.* The word here used would, in this connection, include both the mere absence of love, and positive hatred. It is designed to include the whole of that state of mind where there is not love for the brethren. ¶ *Is in darkness.* Ver. 9. ¶ *And walketh in darkness.* He is like one who walks in the dark, and who sees no object distinctly. See Notes, John xii. 35. ¶ *And knoweth not whither he goeth.* Like one in the dark. He wanders about not knowing what direction he shall take, or where the course which he is on will lead. The general meaning is, that he is ignorant of the whole nature of religion; or, in other words, love to the brethren is a central virtue in religion, and when a man has not that, his mind is entirely clouded on the whole subject, and he shows that he knows nothing of its nature. There is no virtue that is designed to be made more prominent in Christianity; and there is none that will throw its influence farther over a man's life.

12. *I write unto you, little children.* There has been much difference of opinion among commentators in regard to

this verse and the three following verses, on account of their apparent tautology. Even Doddridge supposes that considerable error has here crept into the text, and that a portion of these verses should be omitted in order to avoid the repetition. But there is no authority for omitting any portion of the text, and the passage is very much in accordance with the general style of the apostle John. The author of this epistle was evidently accustomed to express his thoughts in a great variety of ways, having even the appearance of tautology, that the exact idea might be before his readers, and that his meaning might not be misapprehended. In order to show that the truths which he was uttering in this epistle pertained to all, and to secure the interest of all in them, he addresses himself to different classes, and says that there were reasons existing in regard to each class why he wrote to them. In the expressions 'I write,' and 'I have written,' he refers to what is found in the epistle itself, and the statements in these verses are designed to be *reasons* why he brought these truths before their minds. The word here rendered *little children* (παιδιά) is different from that used in ver. 13. and rendered there *little children*, (παιδια;) but there can be little doubt that the same class of persons is intended. Some have indeed supposed that by the term *little children* here, as in ver. 1, the apostle means to address all believers—speaking to them as a father; but it seems more appropriate to suppose that he means in these verses to divide the body of Christians whom he addressed into three classes—children, young men, and the aged, and to state particular reasons why he wrote to each. If the term (παιδιά) *little children* here means the same as the term (παιδια) *little children* in ver. 13, then he addresses each of these classes *twice* in these two verses, giving each time somewhat varied reasons why he addressed them. That, by



the term 'little children' here, he means children literally, seems to me to be clear, (1,) because this is the usual meaning of the word, and should be understood to be the meaning here, unless there is something in the connection to show that it is used in a metaphorical sense; (2,) because it seems necessary to understand the other expressions, 'young men,' and 'fathers,' in a literal sense, as denoting those more advanced in life; (3,) because this would be quite in character for the apostle John. He had recorded, and would doubtless remember the solemn injunction of the Saviour to Peter, (John xxi. 15,) to 'feed his lambs,' and the aged apostle could not but feel that what was worthy of so solemn an injunction from the Lord, was worthy of his attention and care as an apostle; and (4,) because in that case, each class, fathers, young men, and children, would be twice addressed in these two verses; whereas if we understood this of Christians in general, then fathers and young men would be twice addressed, and children but once. If this be so, it may be remarked, (1,) that there were probably quite young children in the church in the time of the apostle John, for the word would naturally convey that idea. (2,) The *exact* age cannot be indeed determined, but two things are clear: (a) one is, that they were undoubtedly under twenty years of age, since they were younger than the 'young men'—*νεανίσκοι*—a word usually applied to those who were in the vigour of life, from about the period of twenty up to forty years, (Notes, ver. 13,) and this word would embrace all who were younger than that class; and (b) the other is, that the word itself would convey the idea that they were in quite early life, as the word *children*—a fair translation of it—does now with us. It is not possible to determine, from the use of this word, *precisely* of what age the class here referred to was, but the word would imply that they were in quite early life. No rule is laid down in the New Testament as to the age in which children may be admitted to the communion. The whole subject is left to the wise discretion of the church, and is safely left there. Cases must vary so much

that no rule could be laid down; and little or no evil has arisen from leaving the point undetermined in the Scriptures. It may be doubted, however, whether the church has not been rather in danger of erring by having it deferred too late, than by admitting children too early. (3.) Such children, if worthy the attention of an aged apostle, should receive the particular notice of pastors now. Comp. Notes, John xxi. 15. There are reasons in all cases now, as there were then, why this part of a congregation should receive the special attention of a minister of religion. The hopes of a church are in them. Their minds are susceptible to impression. The character of the piety in the next age will depend on their views of religion. All that there is of value in the church and the world will soon pass into their hands. The houses, farms, factories; the pulpits, and the chairs of professors in colleges; the seats of senators and the benches of judges; the great offices of state, and all the offices in the church; the interests of learning, and of benevolence and liberty, are all soon to be under their control. Everything valuable in this world will soon depend on their conduct and character; and who, therefore, can over-estimate the importance of training them up in just views of religion. As John wrote to this class, should not pastors *preach* to them? ¶ *Because*—*ὅτι*. This particle may be rendered *for*, or *because*; and the meaning may be either that the fact that their sins were forgiven was a *reason* for writing to them, since it would be proper, on that ground, to exhort them to a holy life; or that he wrote to them because it was a privilege to address them as those who were forgiven, for he felt that, in speaking to *them*, he could address them as such. It seems to me that it is to be taken as a *causal* particle, and that the apostle, in the various specifications which he makes, designs to assign particular *reasons* why he wrote to each class, enjoining on them the duties of a holy life. Comp. ver. 21. ¶ *Your sins are forgiven you*. That is, this is a *reason* why he wrote to them, and enjoined these things on them. The meaning seems to be, that the fact that our past sins are blotted

13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him <sup>a</sup> *that is* from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have

overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. <sup>b</sup>

a 1 Jn. 1. 1.

b Jn. 14. 7, 9.

out furnishes a strong *reason* why we should be holy. That reason is founded on the goodness of God in doing it, and on the obligation under which we are brought by the fact that God has had mercy on us. This is a consideration which children will feel as well as others; for there is nothing which will tend more to make a child obedient hereafter, than the fact that a parent freely forgives the past. ¶ *For his name's sake.* On account of the name of Christ; that is, in virtue of what he has done for us. In ver. 13, he states another reason why he wrote to this same class—"because they had known the Father."

13. *I write unto you, fathers.* As there were special reasons for writing to children, so there were also for writing to those who were more mature in life. The class here addressed would embrace all those who were in advance of the *ναῖονοί*, or *young men*, and would properly include those who were at the head of families. ¶ *Because ye have known him that is from the beginning.* That is, the Lord Jesus Christ. Notes, chap. i. 1. The argument is, that they had been long acquainted with the principles of his religion, and understood well its doctrines and duties. It cannot be certainly inferred from this that they had had a *personal* acquaintance with the Lord Jesus: yet that this might have been is not impossible, for John had himself personally known him, and there may have been some among those to whom he wrote who had also seen and known him. If this were so, it would give additional impressiveness to the reason assigned here for writing to them, and for reminding them of the principles of that religion which they had learned from his own lips and example. But perhaps all that is necessarily implied in this passage is, that they had had long opportunity of becoming acquainted with the religion of the Son of God, and that having understood that thoroughly, it was proper to address them as aged and established Christians,

and to call on them to maintain the true doctrines of the gospel, against the specious but dangerous errors which then prevailed. ¶ *I write unto you, young men.* *ναῖονοί.* This word would properly embrace those who were in the vigour of life, midway between children and old men. It is uniformly rendered *young men* in the New Testament: Matt. xix. 20, 22; Mark xiv. 51; xvi. 5; Luke vii. 14; Acts ii. 17; v. 10; and in the passages before us. It does not elsewhere occur. It is commonly understood as embracing those in the prime and vigour of manhood up to the period of about forty years.—*Robinson.* ¶ *Because ye have overcome the wicked one.* That is, because you have vigour, (see the next verse,) and that vigour you have shown by overcoming the assaults of the wicked one—the devil. You have triumphed over the passions which prevail in early life; you have combated the allurements of vice, ambition, covetousness, and sensuality; and you have shown that there is a strength of character and of piety on which reliance can be placed in promoting religion. It is proper, therefore, to exhort you not to disgrace the victory which you have already gained, but to employ your vigour of character in maintaining the cause of the Saviour. The thing to which John appeals here is the energy of those at this period of life, and it is proper at all times to make this the ground of appeal in addressing a church. It is right to call on those who are in the prime of life, and who are endowed with energy of character, to employ their talents in the service of the Lord Jesus, and to stand up as the open advocates of truth. Thus the apostle calls on the three great classes into which a community or a church may be considered as divided: *youth*, because their sins were already forgiven, and, though young, they had actually entered on a career of virtue and religion, a career which by all means they ought to be exhorted to pursue; *fathers*, or

14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, be-

cause ye are strong; <sup>a</sup> and the word of God abideth <sup>b</sup> in you, and ye have overcome <sup>c</sup> the wicked one.

<sup>a</sup> Ep. 6.10.

<sup>b</sup> Jn. 15.7.

<sup>c</sup> Ro. 3.7, &c.

aged men, because they had had long experience in religion, and had a thorough acquaintance with the doctrines and duties of the gospel, and they might be expected to stand steadfastly as examples to others; and *young men*, those who were in the vigour and prime of life, because they had shown that they had power to resist evil, and were endowed with strength, and it was proper to call on them to exert their vigour in the sacred cause of religion. ¶ *I write unto you, little children.* Many mss. read here, *I have written*—*ἔγραψα*—instead of *I write*—*γράφω*. This reading is found in both the ancient Syriac versions, and in the Coptic; it was followed by Origen, Cyril, Photius, and Œcumenius; and it is adopted by Grotius, Mill, and Hahn, and is probably the true reading. The connection seems to demand this. In vers. 12, 13, the apostle uses the word *γράφω*—*I write*—in relation to children, fathers, and young men; in the passage before us, and in the next verse, he again addresses children, fathers, and young men, and in relation to the two latter, he says *ἔγραψα*—*I have written*. The connection, therefore, seems to demand that the same word should be employed here also. Some persons have supposed that the whole passage is spurious, but of that there is no evidence; and, as we have elsewhere seen, it is not uncommon for John to repeat a sentiment, and to place it in a variety of lights, in order that he might make it certain that he was not misapprehended. Some have supposed, also, that the expression '*I have written*,' refers to some former epistle which is now lost, or to the Gospel by the same author, which had been sent to them, (*Hug.*) and that he means here to remind them that he had written to them on some former occasion, inculcating the same sentiments which he now expressed. But there is no evidence of this, and this supposition is not necessary in order to a correct understanding of the passage. In the former expression, '*I write*,' the state of mind would be that of one who

fixed his attention on what he was *then* doing, and the particular reason *why* he did it—and the apostle states these reasons in vers. 12, 13. Yet it would not be unnatural for him immediately to throw his mind into the past, and to state the reasons why he had resolved to write to them at all, and then to look at what he had purposed to say as already done, and to state the reasons why that was done. Thus one who sat down to write a letter to a friend might appropriately state in any part of the letter the reasons which had induced him to write at all to him on the subject. If he fixed his attention on the fact that he was *actually* writing, and on the reasons why he wrote, he would express himself in the present tense—*I write*; if on the previous purpose, or the reasons which induced him to write at all, he would use the past tense—*I have written* for such and such reasons. So John seems here, in order to make what he says emphatic, to refer to two states of his own mind: the one when he *resolved* to write, and the reasons which occurred to him then; and the other when he was *actually* writing, and the reasons which occurred to him then. The reasons are indeed substantially the same, but they are contemplated from different points of view, and that fact shows that what he did was done with deliberation, and from a deep sense of duty. ¶ *Because ye have known the Father.* In verse 12, the reason assigned for writing to this class is, that their sins were forgiven. The reason assigned here is, that in early life they had become acquainted with God as a Father. He desires that they would show themselves dutiful and faithful children in this relation which they sustained to him. Even children may learn to regard God as their Father, and may have towards him all the affectionate interest which grows out of this relation.

14. *I have written unto you, fathers, because, &c.* The reason assigned here for writing to fathers is the same which is given in the previous verse. It would

15 Love <sup>a</sup> not the world, neither <sup>b</sup> any man love the world, the love of the things *that are* in the world. If of the Father is not in him.

<sup>a</sup> Ro. 12.2.

<sup>b</sup> Mat. 6.24; Ga. 1.10; Ja. 4.4.

seem that, in respect to them, the apostle regarded this as a sufficient reason for writing to them, and only meant to enforce it by repeating it. The fact that they had through many years been acquainted with the doctrines and duties of the true religion, seemed to him a sufficient reason for writing to them, and for exhorting them to a steadfast adherence to those principles and duties. ¶ *I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, &c.* The two additional circumstances which he here mentions as reasons for writing to young men are, that they are strong, and that the word of God abides in them. The first of these reasons is, that they were strong; that is, that they were qualified for active and useful service in the cause of the Redeemer. Children were yet too young and feeble to appeal to them by this motive, and the powers of the aged were exhausted; but those who were in the vigour of life might be called upon for active service in the cause of the Lord Jesus. The same appeal may be made now to the same class; and the fact that they *are* thus vigorous is a proper ground of exhortation, for the church needs their active services, and they are bound to devote their powers to the cause of truth. The other additional ground of appeal is, that the word of God abode in them; that is, that those of this class to whom he wrote had showed, perhaps in time of temptation, that they adhered firmly to the principles of religion. They had not flinched from an open defence of the truths of religion when assailed; they had not been seduced by the plausible arts of the advocates of error, but they had had strength to overcome the wicked one. The reason here for appealing to this class is, that in fact they *had* showed that they could be relied on, and it was proper to depend on them to advocate the great principles of Christianity.

15. *Love not the world.* The term *world* seems to be used in the Scriptures in three senses: (1.) As denoting the physical universe; the world as it appears to the eye; the world considered

as the work of God, as a material creation. (2.) The world as applied to the *people* that reside in it—'the world of mankind.' (3.) As the dwellers on the earth are by nature without religion, and act under a set of maxims, aims, and principles that have reference only to this life, the term comes to be used with reference to that community; that is, to the objects which they peculiarly seek, and the principles by which they are actuated. Considered with reference to the first sense of the word, it is not improper to love the world as the work of God, and as illustrating his perfections; for we may suppose that God loves his own works, and it is not wrong that we should find pleasure in their contemplation. Considered with reference to the second sense of the word, it is not wrong to love the *people* of the world with a love of benevolence, and to have attachment to our kindred and friends who constitute a part of it, though they are not Christians. It is only with reference to the word as used in the third sense that the command here can be understood to be applicable, or that the love of the world is forbidden; with reference to the objects sought, the maxims that prevail, the principles that reign in that community that lives for this world as contradistinguished from the world to come. The meaning is, that we are not to fix our affections on worldly objects—on what the world can furnish—as our portion, with the spirit with which they do who live only for this world, regardless of the life to come. We are not to make this world the object of our chief affection; we are not to be influenced by the maxims and feelings which prevail among those who do. Comp. Notes, Rom. xii. 2, and James iv. 4. See also Matt. xvi. 26; Luke ix. 25; 1 Cor. i. 20; iii. 19; Gal. iv. 3; Col. ii. 8. ¶ *Neither the things that are in the world.* Referred to in the next verse as 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.' This explanation shows what John meant by 'the things that are in the world.' He does not say that we are in

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, <sup>a</sup> and the lust of the <sup>b</sup> eyes, and the pride <sup>c</sup> of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And <sup>a</sup> the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

<sup>a</sup> 2Pe.2.10.

<sup>b</sup> Ps.119.37.

<sup>c</sup> Ps.73.6.

<sup>d</sup> Ps.39.6; 1 Co.7.31.

no sense to love *anything* that is in the material world; that we are to feel no interest in flowers, and streams, and forests, and fountains; that we are to have no admiration for what God has done as the Creator of all things; that we are to cherish no love for any of the inhabitants of the world, our friends and kindred; or that we are to pursue none of the objects of this life in making provision for our families; but that we are *not* to love the things which are sought merely to pamper the appetite, to please the eye, or to promote pride in living. These are the objects sought by the people of the world; these are not the objects to be sought by the Christian. ¶ *If any man love the world, &c.* If, in this sense, a man loves the world, it shows that he has no true religion; that is, if characteristically he loves the world as his portion, and lives for that; if it is the ruling principle of his life to gain and enjoy that, it shows that his heart has never been renewed, and that he has no part with the children of God. See Notes, James iv. 4; Matt. vi. 24.

16. *For all that is in the world.* That is, all that really constitutes the world, or that enters into the aims and purposes of those who live for this life. All that that community lives for may be comprised under the following things. ¶ *The lust of the flesh.* The word *lust* is used here in the general sense of *desire*, or that which is the object of desire—not in the narrow sense in which it is now commonly used to denote libidinous passion. See Notes, James i. 14. The phrase, ‘the lust of the flesh,’ here denotes that which pampers the appetites, or all that is connected with the indulgence of the mere animal propensities. A large part of the world lives for little more than this. This is the lowest form of worldly indulgence; those which are immediately specified being of a higher order, though still merely worldly. ¶ *And the lust of the eyes.* That which is designed merely to gratify the sight.

This would include, of course, costly raiment, jewels, gorgeous furniture, splendid palaces, pleasure-grounds, &c. The object is to refer to the gay vanities of this world, the thing on which the eye delights to rest where there is no higher object of life. It does not, of course, mean that the eye is never to be gratified, or that we can find as much pleasure in an ugly as in a handsome object, or that it is sinful to find pleasure in beholding objects of real beauty—for the world, as formed by its Creator, is full of such things, and he could not but have intended that pleasure should enter the soul through the eye, or that the beauties which he has shed so lavishly over his works should contribute to the happiness of his creatures; but the apostle refers to this when it is the great and leading object of life—when it is sought without any connection with religion or reference to the world to come. ¶ *And the pride of life.* The word here used means, properly, ostentation or boasting, and then arrogance or pride. —*Robinson.* It refers to whatever there is that tends to promote pride, or that is an index of pride, such as the ostentatious display of dress, equipage, furniture, &c. ¶ *Is not of the Father.* Does not proceed from God, or meet with his approbation. It is not of the nature of true religion to seek these things, nor can their pursuit be reconciled with the existence of real piety in the heart. The sincere Christian has nobler ends; and he who has not any higher ends, and whose conduct and feelings can all be accounted for by a desire for these things, cannot be a true Christian. ¶ *But is of the world.* Is originated solely by the objects and purposes of this life, where religion and the life to come are excluded.

17. *And the world passeth away.* Everything properly constituting this world where religion is excluded. The reference here does not seem to be so much to the material world, as to the

18 Little children, it is the last <sup>a</sup> time: and as ye have heard <sup>b</sup> that antichrist shall come, even now are

there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

<sup>a</sup> He. 1.2.

<sup>b</sup> Mat. 24.24; 1 Ti. 4.1.

scenes of show and vanity which make up the world. These things are passing away like the shifting scenes of the stage. See Notes, 1 Cor. vii. 31. ¶ *And the lust thereof.* All that is here so much the object of desire. These things are like a pageant, which only amuses the eye for a moment, and then disappears for ever. ¶ *But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.* This cannot mean that he will never die; but it means that he has built his happiness on a basis which is secure, and which can never pass away. Comp. Notes, Matt. vii. 24-27.

18. *Little children.* See ver. 1. ¶ *It is the last time.* The closing period or dispensation; that dispensation in which the affairs of the world are ultimately to be wound up. The apostle does not, however, say that the end of the world would soon occur, nor does he intimate how long this dispensation would be. That period might continue through many ages or centuries, and still be the last dispensation, or that in which the affairs of the world would be finally closed. See Notes, Isa. ii. 2; Acts ii. 17; Heb. i. 2. Some have supposed that the 'last time' here refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the Jewish economy; but the more natural interpretation is to refer it to the last dispensation of the world, and to suppose that the apostle meant to say that there were clear evidences that that period had arrived. ¶ *And as ye have heard that antichrist shall come.* The word *antichrist* occurs in the New Testament only in these epistles of John, 1 John ii. 18, 22; iv. 3; 2 John 7. The proper meaning of *anti* (*ἀντί*) in composition is, (1,) *over-against*, as *ἀντιτάττειν*; (2,) *contrary to*, as *ἀντιλέγειν*; (3,) *reciprocity*, as *ἀνταποδίδωμι*; (4,) *substitution*, as *ἀντιβασιλεύς*; (5,) the place of the king, or *ἀνθύπατος*—*proconsul*. The word *antichrist*, therefore, might denote any one who either was or claimed to be in the place of Christ, or one who, for any cause, was in opposition to him. The word, further, would apply to one

opposed to him, on whatever ground the opposition might be; whether it were open and avowed, or whether it were only *in fact*, as resulting from certain claims which were adverse to his, or which were inconsistent with his. A *vice-functionary*, or an *opposing functionary*, would be the idea which the word would naturally suggest. If the word stood alone, and there were nothing said further to explain its meaning, we should think, when the word *antichrist* was used, either of one who claimed to be the Christ, and who thus was a rival; or of one who stood in opposition to him on some other ground. That which constituted the characteristics of antichrist, according to John, who only has used the word, he has himself stated. Ver. 22, 'Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.' Chap. iv. 3, 'And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist.' 2 John 7, 'For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.' From this it is clear, that John understood by the word all those that denied that Jesus is the Messiah, or that the Messiah has come in the flesh. If they held that Jesus was a deceiver, and that he was not the Christ, or if they maintained that, though Christ had come, he had not come in the flesh, that is, with a proper human nature, this showed that such persons had the spirit of antichrist. They arrayed themselves against him, and held doctrines which were in fact in entire opposition to the Son of God. It would appear then that John does not use the word in the sense which it would bear as denoting one who set up a rival claim, or who came in the place of Christ, but in the sense of those who were opposed to him by denying essential doctrines in regard to his person and advent. It is not certainly known to what persons he refers, but it would

seem not improbable to Jewish adversaries, (see Suicer's Thesaur. s. voc.,) or to some forms of the Gnostic belief. See Notes, chap. iv. 2. The doctrine respecting antichrist, as stated in the New Testament, may be summed up in the following particulars: (1.) That there would be those, perhaps in considerable numbers, who would openly claim to be the Christ, or the true Messiah, Matt. xxiv. 5, 24. (2.) That there would be a spirit, which would manifest itself early in the church, that would strongly tend to some great apostasy under some one head or leader, or to a concentration on an individual, or a succession of individuals, who would have eminently the spirit of antichrist, though for a time the development of that spirit would be hindered or restrained. See Notes, 2 Thess. ii. 1-7. (3.) That this would be ultimately concentrated on a single leader—'the man of sin'—and embodied under some great apostasy, at the head of which would be that 'man of sin,' 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4, 8, 9, 10. It is to this that *Paul* particularly refers, or this is the view which he took of this apostasy, and it is this which *he* particularly describes. (4.) That, in the mean time, and before the elements of the great apostasy should be concentrated and embodied, there might not be a few who would partake of the same general spirit, and who would be equally opposed to Christ in their doctrines and aims; that is, who would embody in themselves the essential spirit of antichrist, and by whose appearing it might be known that the last dispensation had come. It is to these that *John* refers, and these he found in his own age. *Paul* fixed the eye on future times, when the spirit of antichrist should be embodied under a distinct and mighty organization; *John* on his own time, and found then essentially what it had been predicted would occur in the church. He here says that they had been taught to expect that antichrist would come under the last dispensation; and it is implied that it could be ascertained that it was the last time, from the fact that the predicted opposer of Christ had come. The reference is probably to the language of the Saviour, that before the end should be, and as a sign

that it was coming, many would arise claiming to be Christ, and, of course, practically denying that he was the Christ. Matt. xxiv. 5, 'Many shall come in my name, saying, *I am Christ*; and shall deceive many.' Ver. 24, 'And there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets; and they shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.' This prediction it is probable the apostles had referred to wherever they had preached, so that there was a general expectation that one or more persons would appear claiming to be the Christ, or maintaining such opinions as to be inconsistent with the true doctrine that Jesus was the Messiah. Such persons, *John* says, had then in fact appeared, by which it could be known that they were living under the closing dispensations of the world referred to by the Saviour. Comp. Notes, 2 Thess. ii. 2-5. ¶ *Even now are there many antichrists.* There are many who have the characteristics which it was predicted that antichrist would have; that is, as explained above, there are many who deny that Jesus is the Messiah, or who deny that he has come in the flesh. If they maintained that Jesus was an impostor and not the true Messiah, or if, though they admitted that the Messiah had come, they affirmed, as the *Docetae* did, (Note on chap. iv. 2,) that he had come in *appearance* only, and not really come in the flesh, this was the spirit of antichrist. *John* says that there were many such persons in fact in his time. It would seem from this that *John* did not refer to a single individual, or to a succession of individuals who should come previous to the winding up of the affairs of the world, as *Paul* did, (2 Thess. ii. 2, seq.,) but that he understood that there might be many at the same time who would evince the spirit of antichrist. Both he and *Paul*, however, refer to the expectation that before the coming of the Saviour to judge the world there would be prominent adversaries of the Christian religion, and that the end would not come until such adversaries appeared. *Paul* goes more into detail, and describes the characteristics of the great apostasy more at length, (2 Thess. ii. 2, seq.; 1

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us: for <sup>a</sup> if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they*

*went out*, that they might be made manifest <sup>b</sup> that they were not all of us.

a 2 TI.3.19.

b 2 TI.3.9.

Tim. iv. 1, seq.; 2 Tim. iii. 1, seq. ;) John says, not that the appearing of these persons indicated that the end of the world was near, but that they had such characteristics as to show that they were living in the last dispensation. Paul so describes them as to show that the end of the world was not to be immediately expected, (Notes, 2 Thess. ii. 1, seq. ;) John, without referring to that point, says that there were enough of that character then to prove that the last dispensation had come, though he does not say how long it would continue. ¶ *Whereby we know it is the last time.* They have the characteristics which it was predicted many would have before the end of the world should come. The evidence that it was 'the last time,' or the closing dispensation of the world, derived from the appearing of these persons, consists simply in the fact that it was predicted that such persons would appear under the Christian, or the last dispensation, Matt. xxiv. 5, 24-27. Their appearance was to precede the coming of the Saviour, though it is not said *how long* it would precede that; but at any time the appearing of such persons would be an evidence that it was the closing dispensation of the world, for the Saviour, in his predictions respecting them, had said that they would appear before he should return to judgment. It cannot now be determined precisely to what classes of persons there is reference here, because we know too little of the religious state of the times to which the apostle refers. No one can prove, however, that there were *not* persons at that time who so fully corresponded to the predictions of the Saviour as to be a complete fulfilment of what he said, and to demonstrate that the last age had truly come. It would seem probable that there may have been reference to some Jewish adversaries, who denied that Jesus was the Messiah, (*Rob. Lex.*) or to some persons who had already broached the doctrine of the *Docetæ*, that though Jesus was the Mes-

siah, yet that he was a man in appearance only, and had not really come in the flesh. Classes of persons of each description abounded in the early ages of the church.

19. *They went out from us.* From the church. That is, they had once been professors of the religion of the Saviour, though their apostasy showed that they never had any true piety. John refers to the fact that they had once been in the church, perhaps to remind those to whom he wrote that they knew them well, and could readily appreciate their character. It was a humiliating statement that those who showed themselves to be so utterly opposed to religion had once been members of the Christian church; but this is a statement which we are often compelled to make. ¶ *But they were not of us.* That is, they did not really belong to us, or were not true Christians. See Notes, Matt. vii. 23. This passage proves that these persons, whatever their pretensions and professions may have been, were never sincere Christians. The same remark may be made of all who apostatize from the faith, and become teachers of error. They never were truly converted; never belonged really to the spiritual church of Christ. ¶ *For if they had been of us.* If they had been sincere and true Christians. ¶ *They would no doubt have continued with us.* The words '*no doubt*' are supplied by our translators, but the affirmation is equally strong without them: 'they would have remained with us.' This affirms, without any ambiguity or qualification, that if they had been true Christians they *would* have remained in the church; that is, they would not have apostatized. There could not be a more positive affirmation than that which is implied here, that those who are true Christians will continue to be such; or that the saints will not fall away from grace. John affirms it of these persons, that if they had been true Christians they would



never have departed from the church. He makes the declaration so general that it may be regarded as a universal truth, that if *any* are truly 'of us,' that is, if they are true Christians, they will continue in the church, or will never fall away. The statement is so made also as to teach that if any *do* fall away from the church, the fact is full proof that they never had any religion, for if they had had they would have remained steadfast in the church. ¶ *But they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* It was suffered or permitted in the providence of God that this should occur, *in order* that it might be seen and known that they were not true Christians, or in order that their real character might be developed. It was desirable that this should be done, (a,) in order that the church might be purified from their influence—comp. Notes, John xv. 2; (b) in order that it might not be responsible for their conduct, or reproached on account of it; (c) in order that their real character might be developed, and they might themselves see that they were not true Christians; (d) in order that, being seen and known as apostates, their opinions and conduct might have less influence than if they were connected with the church; (e) in order that they might themselves understand their own true character, and no longer live under the delusive opinion that they were Christians and were safe, but that, seeing themselves in their true light, they might be brought to repentance. For there is only a most slender prospect that any who are deceived in the church will ever be brought to true repentance there; and slight as is the hope that one who apostatizes will be, such an event is much more probable than it would be if he remained in the church. Men are more likely to be converted when their character is known and understood, than they are when playing a game of deception, or are themselves deceived. What is here affirmed of these persons often occurs now; and those who have no true religion are often suffered to apostatize from their profession for the same purposes. It is better that they should

cease to have any connection with the church than that they should remain in it; and God often suffers them to fall away even from the profession of religion, in order that they may not do injury as professing Christians. This very important passage, then, teaches the following things: (1.) That when men apostatize from the profession of religion, and embrace fatal error, or live in sin, it proves that they never had any true piety. (2.) The fact that such persons fall away cannot be adduced to prove that Christians ever fall from grace, for it demonstrates nothing on that point, but proves only that these persons never had any real piety. They may have had much that seemed to be religion; they may have been zealous, and apparently devoted to God, and may even have had much comfort and peace in what they took to be piety; they may have been eminently 'gifted' in prayer, or may have even been successful preachers of the gospel, but all this does not prove that they ever had any piety, nor does the fact that such persons apostatize from their profession throw any light on a question quite foreign to this—whether true Christians ever fall from grace. Comp. Matt. vii. 22, 23. (3.) The passage before us proves that if any are true Christians they will remain in the church, or will certainly persevere and be saved. They may indeed backslide grievously; they may wander far away, and pain the hearts of their brethren, and give occasion to the enemies of religion to speak reproachfully; but the apostle says, 'if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.' (4.) One of the best evidences of true piety is found in the fact of continuing with the church. I do not mean nominally and formally, but really and spiritually, having the heart with the church; loving its peace and promoting its welfare; identifying ourselves with real Christians, and showing that we are ready to co-operate with those who love the Lord Jesus and its cause. (5.) The main reason why professing Christians are suffered to apostatize is to show that they had no true religion. It is desirable that they should see it themselves; desirable that others should

20 But ye have an unction <sup>a</sup> from

<sup>a</sup> 2 Co. 1. 21.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Co. 2. 15.

the Holy One, and ye know <sup>b</sup> all things.

see it also. It is better that it should be known that they had no true religion than that they should remain in the church to be a burden on its movements, and a reproach to the cause. By being allowed thus to separate themselves from the church, they *may* be brought to remember their violated vows, and the church will be free from the reproach of having those in its bosom who are a dishonour to the Christian name. We are not to wonder, then, if persons apostatize who have been professors of true religion; and we are not to suppose that the greatest injury is done to the cause when they do it. A *greater* injury by far is done when such persons remain in the church.

20. *But ye have an unction from the Holy One.* The apostle in this verse evidently intends to say that he had no apprehension in regard to those to whom he wrote that *they* would thus apostatize, and bring dishonour on their religion. They had been so anointed by the Holy Spirit that they understood the true nature of religion, and it might be confidently expected that they would persevere. The word *unction* or *anointing* (*χρίσμα*) means, properly, 'something rubbed in or ointed'; oil for anointing, *ointment*; then it means an anointing. The allusion is to the anointing of kings and priests, or their inauguration or coronation, (1 Sam. x. 1; xvi. 13; Exod. xxviii. 41; xl. 15; comp. Notes on Matt. i. 1;) and the idea seems to have been that the oil thus used was emblematic of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit as qualifying them for the discharge of the duties of their office. Christians, in the New Testament, are described as 'kings and priests,' (Rev. i. 6; v. 10,) and as a 'royal priesthood,' (Notes, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9;) and hence they are represented as *anointed*, or as endowed with those graces of the Spirit, of which anointing was the emblem. The phrase 'the Holy One' refers here, doubtless, to the Holy Spirit, that Spirit whose influences are imparted to the people of God, to enlighten, to sanctify, and to

comfort them in their trials. The particular reference here is to the influences of that Spirit as giving them clear and just views of the nature of religion, and thus securing them from error and apostasy. ¶ *And ye know all things.* That is, all things which it is essential that you should know on the subject of religion. See Notes, John xvi. 13; 1 Cor. ii. 15. The meaning cannot be that they knew all things pertaining to history, to science, to literature, and to the arts; but that, under the influences of the Holy Spirit, they had been made so thoroughly acquainted with the truths and duties of the Christian religion, that they might be regarded as safe from the danger of fatal error. The same may be said of all true Christians now, that they are so taught by the Spirit of God, that they have a practical acquaintance with what religion is, and with what it requires, and are secure from falling into fatal error. In regard to the general meaning of this verse, then, it may be observed: I. That it does *not* mean any one of the following things: (1.) That Christians are literally instructed by the Holy Spirit in *all* things, or that they literally understand all subjects. The teaching, whatever it may be, refers only to religion. (2.) It is not meant that any new faculties of mind are conferred on them, or any increased intellectual endowments, by their religion. It is not a fact that Christians, as such, are superior in mental endowments to others; nor that by their religion they have any mental traits which they had not before their conversion. Paul, Peter, and John had essentially the same mental characteristics after their conversion which they had before; and the same is true of all Christians. (3.) It is not meant that any new truth is revealed to the mind by the Holy Spirit. All the truth that is brought before the mind of the Christian is to be found in the word of God, and *revelation*, as such, was completed when the Bible was finished. (4.) It is not meant that anything is perceived by Christians which they had not the natural faculty for

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but

because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

perceiving before their conversion, or which other men have not also the natural faculty for perceiving. The difficulty with men is not a defect of natural faculties, it is in the blindness of the heart. II. The statement here made by John *does* imply, it is supposed, the following things: (1.) That the minds of Christians are so enlightened that they have a new perception of the truth. They see it in a light in which they did not before. They see it *as* truth. They see its beauty, its force, its adaptedness to their condition and wants. They understand the subject of religion better than they once did, and better than others do. What was once dark appears now plain; what once had no beauty to their minds now appears beautiful; what was once repellant is now attractive. (2.) They see this *to be* true; that is, they see it in such a light that they cannot doubt that it *is* true. They have such views of the doctrines of religion, that they have no doubt that they are true, and are willing on the belief of their truth to lay down their lives, and stake their eternal interests. (3.) Their knowledge of truth is enlarged. They become acquainted with *more* truths than they would have known if they had not been under the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Their range of thought is greater; their vision more extended, as well as more clear. III. The *evidence* that this is so is found in the following things: (1.) The express statements of Scripture. See 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15, and the Notes on that passage. Comp. John xvi. 13, 14. (2.) It is a matter of fact that it is so. (a) Men by nature do not perceive any beauty in the truths of religion. They are distasteful to them, or they are repulsive and offensive. 'The doctrine of the cross is to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness.' They may see indeed the force of an argument, but they do not see the beauty of the way of salvation. (b) When they are converted they do. These things appear to them to be changed, and they see them in a new light, and perceive a beauty in them which they never did

before. (c) There is often a surprising *developement* of religious knowledge when persons are converted. They seem to understand the way of salvation, and the whole subject of religion, in a manner and to an extent which cannot be accounted for, except on the supposition of a teaching from above. (d) This is manifest also in the knowledge which persons otherwise ignorant exhibit on the subject of religion. With few advantages for education, and with no remarkable talents, they show an acquaintance with the truth, a knowledge of religion, an ability to defend the doctrines of Christianity, and to instruct others in the way of salvation, which could have been derived only from some source superior to themselves. Comp. John vii. 15; Acts iv. 13. (e) The same thing is shown by their *adherence to truth* in the midst of persecution, and simply because they perceive that for which they die to be the truth. And is there anything incredible in this? May not the mind see what truth is? How do we judge of an axiom in mathematics, or of a proposition that is demonstrated, but by the fact that the mind *perceives* it to be true, and cannot doubt it? And may it not be so in regard to religious truth—especially when that truth is seen to accord with what we know of ourselves, our lost condition as sinners, and our need of a Saviour, and when we see that the truths revealed in the Scriptures are exactly adapted to our wants?

[See also the Supplementary Note under 1 Cor. ii. 14.]

21. *I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth.* You are not to regard my writing to you in this earnest manner as any evidence that I do not suppose you to be acquainted with religion and its duties. Some, perhaps, might have been disposed to put this construction on what he had said, but he assures them that that was not the reason why he had thus addressed them. The very fact that they *did* understand the subject of religion, he says, was rather the reason why he

22 Who is a liar, but he that  
 \* denieth that Jesus is the Christ?

α 1 Jn. 4.3.

wrote to them. ¶ *But because ye know it.* This was the ground of his hope that his appeal would be effectual. If they had never known what religion was, if they were ignorant of its nature and its claims, he would have had much less hope of being able to guard them against error, and of securing their steady walk in the path of piety. We may always make a strong and confident appeal to those who really understand what the nature of religion is, and what are the evidences of its truth. ¶ *And that no lie is of the truth.* No form of error, however plausible it may appear, however ingeniously it may be defended, and however much it may seem to be favourable to human virtue and happiness, can be founded in truth. What the apostle says here has somewhat the aspect of a truism, but it contains a real truth of vital importance, and one which should have great influence in determining our minds in regard to any proposed opinion or doctrine. Error often appears plausible. It seems to be adapted to relieve the mind of many difficulties which perplex and embarrass it on the subject of religion. It seems to be adapted to promote religion. It seems to make those who embrace it happy, and for a time they apparently enjoy religion. But John says that however plausible all this may be, however much it may seem to prove that the doctrines thus embraced are of God, it is a great and vital maxim that *no error can have its foundation in truth*, and, of course, that it must be worthless. The grand question is, *what is truth*; and when that is determined, we can easily settle the inquiries which come up about the various doctrines that are abroad in the world. Mere plausible appearances, or temporary good results that may grow out of a doctrine, do not prove that it is based on truth; for whatever those results may be, it is impossible that any error, however plausible, should have its origin in the truth.

22. *Who is a liar.* That is, who is false; who maintains an erroneous doctrine; who is an impostor, if he is not?

He is antichrist, that denieth the  
 Father and the Son.

The object of the apostle is to specify one of the prevailing forms of error, and to show that, however plausible the arguments might be by which it was defended, it was impossible that it should be true. Their own knowledge of the nature of religion must convince them at once that this opinion was false. ¶ *That denieth that Jesus is the Christ.* It would seem that the apostle referred to a class who admitted that Jesus lived, but who denied that he was the true Messiah. On what grounds they did this is unknown; but to maintain this was, of course, the same as to maintain that he was an impostor. The ground taken may have been that he had not the characteristics ascribed to the Messiah in the prophets; or that he did not furnish evidence that he was sent from God; or that he was an enthusiast. Or perhaps some peculiar form of error may be referred to, like that which is said to have been held by Corinthus, who in his doctrine separated Jesus from Christ, maintaining them to be two distinct persons.—*Doddridge.* ¶ *He is antichrist.* Notes, ver. 18. He has all the characteristics and attributes of antichrist; or, a doctrine which practically involves the denial of both the Father and the Son, must be that of antichrist. ¶ *That denieth the Father and the Son.* That denies the peculiar truths pertaining to God the Father, and to the Son of God. The charge here is not that they entertained incorrect views of God *as such*—as almighty, eternal, most wise, and good; but that they denied the doctrines which religion taught respecting God as Father and Son. Their opinions tended to a denial of what was revealed respecting God as a Father—not in the general sense of being the *Father* of the universe, but in the particular sense of his relation to the Son. It cannot be supposed that they denied the existence and perfections of God as such, nor that they denied that God is a *Father* in the relation which he sustains to the universe; but the meaning must be that what they held went to a practical

23 Whosoever <sup>a</sup>denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [*but he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also.*]

24 Let <sup>b</sup> that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have

heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, *even eternal* <sup>c</sup> life.

<sup>a</sup> Jn.15.23.

<sup>b</sup> 2Jn.6.

<sup>c</sup> Jn.17.3.

denial of that which is peculiar to the true God, considered as sustaining the relation of a Father to his Son Jesus Christ. Correct views of the Father could not be held without correct views of the Son; correct views of the Son could not be held without correct views of the Father. The doctrines respecting the Father and the Son were so connected that one could not be held without holding the other, and one could not be denied without denying the other. Compare Notes, Matt. xi. 27; John v. 23. No man can have just views of God the Father who has not right apprehensions of the Son. As a matter of fact in the world, men have right apprehensions of God only when they have correct views of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

23. *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.* That is, has no just views of the Father, and has no evidence of his friendship. It is only by the Son of God that the Father is made known to men, (Matt. xi. 27; Heb. i. 2, 3,) and it is only through him that we can become reconciled to God, and obtain evidence of his favour. Notes on John v. 23. ¶ *But he that acknowledges the Son, hath the Father also.* This passage, in the common version of the New Testament, is printed in Italics, as if it were not in the original, but was supplied by the translators. It is true that it is not found in all the mss. and versions; but it is found in a large number of mss., and in the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Æthiopic, the Coptic, the Armenian, and the Arabic versions, and in the critical editions of Griesbach, Littmann, and Hahn. It is probable, therefore, that it should be regarded as a genuine portion of the sacred text. It is much in the style of John, and though not necessary to complete the sense, yet it well suits the connection. As it was true that if one denied the Son of God

he could have no pretensions to any proper acquaintance with the Father, so it seemed to follow that if any one had any proper knowledge of the Son of God, and made a suitable confession of him, he had evidence that he was acquainted with the Father. Compare John xvii. 3; Rom. x. 9. Though, therefore, this passage was wanting in many of the mss. consulted by the translators of the Bible, and though in printing it in the manner in which they have they showed the great caution with which they acted in admitting anything doubtful into their translation, yet the passage should be restored to the text, and be regarded as a genuine portion of the word of God. The great truth can never be too clearly stated, or too often inculcated, that it is only by a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ that we can have any true acquaintance with God, and that all who have just views of the Saviour are in fact acquainted with the true God, and are heirs of eternal life.

24. *Let that therefore abide in you.* Adhere steadfastly to it; let the truth obtain a permanent lodgement in the soul. In view of its great importance, and its influence on your happiness here and hereafter, let it never depart from you. ¶ *Which ye have heard from the beginning.* That is, the same doctrines which you have always been taught respecting the Son of God and the way of salvation. Notes, ver. 7. ¶ *Ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.* Truly united to the Son and to the Father; or having evidence of the favour and friendship of the Son and the Father.

25. *And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.* This is evidently added to encourage them in adhering to the truths which they had embraced respecting the Son of God. In maintaining these truths they had the promise of eternal life; in

26 These *things* have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing

teacheth <sup>a</sup> you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in <sup>1</sup> him.

28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear,

<sup>a</sup> Ja. 14. 26.

1 Or, it.

departing from them they had none, for the *promise* of heaven in our world is made only to those who embrace one class of doctrines or opinions. No one can show that any *promise* of heaven is made to the mere possessor of beauty, or wealth, or talent; to the accomplished or the gay; to those who are distinguished for science, or skill in the arts; to rank, or birth, or blood; to courage or strength. Whatever expectation of heaven any one may entertain on account of any of these things, must be traced to something else than a *promise*, for there is none in the Bible to that effect. The *promise* of heaven to men is limited to those who repent of their sins, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who lead a holy life; and if any one will base his hope of heaven on a *promise*, it must be limited to these things. And yet what well-founded hope of heaven *can* there be, except that which is based on a *promise*? How does any one know that he can be saved, unless he has some assurance from God that it may and shall be so? Is not heaven his home? How does any one know that he may dwell there, without some assurance from him that he may? Is not the crown of life his gift? How can any one know that he will possess it, unless he has some promise from him? However men may reason, or conjecture, or hope, the only *promise* of eternal life is found in the Bible; and the fact that we have such a promise should surely be a sufficient inducement to us to hold fast the truth. On the promise of life in the gospel, see John xvii. 2; Rom. ii. 6, 7; Mark xvi. 16; Matt. xxv. 46.

26. *These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.* Respecting their character, and in order to guard you against their arts. The word *seduce* means to lead astray; and it here refers to those who would seduce them from the truth, or lead them into

dangerous error. The apostle does not mean that they had actually seduced them, for he states in the following verse that they were yet safe; but he refers to the fact that there was danger that they might be led into error.

27. *But the anointing which ye have received of him.* See Notes on ver. 20. ¶ *Abideth in you.* The meaning is, that the influence on your heart and life, which results from the fact that you are anointed of God, permanently abides with you, and will keep you from dangerous error. The apostle evidently meant to say that he felt assured that they would not be seduced from the truth, and that his confidence in regard to this was placed in the fact that they had been truly anointed unto God as kings and priests. Thus understood, what he here says is equivalent to the expression of a firm conviction that those who are true Christians will not fall away. Comp. Notes on vers. 19, 20. ¶ *And ye need not that any man teach you.* That is, what are the things essential to true religion. See Notes on ver. 20. ¶ *But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things.* This cannot mean that the mere act of anointing, if that had been performed in their case, would *teach* them; but it refers to what John includes in what he calls the anointing—that is, in the solemn consecrating to the duties of religion under the influences of the Holy Spirit. ¶ *And is truth, and is no lie.* Leads to truth, and not to error. No man was ever led into error by those influences which result from the fact that he has been consecrated to the service of God. ¶ *Ye shall abide in him.* Marg., ‘or it.’ The Greek will bear either construction. The connection, however, seems to demand that it should be understood as referring to *him*—that is, to the Saviour.

28. *And now, little children.* Notes,

we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

29 If ye know that he is right-

1 Or, *know ye.*

ver. 1. ¶ *Abide in him; that, when he shall appear.* In the end of the world, to receive his people to himself. Notes, John xiv. 2, 3. ¶ *We may have confidence.* Greek, *boldness*—*παρρησία*. This word is commonly used to denote openness, plainness, or boldness in speaking, Mark viii. 32; John vii. 4, 13, 26; Acts ii. 29; iv. 13, 29; 2 Cor. iii. 12; vii. 4. Here it means the kind of boldness, or calm assurance, which arises from evidence of piety, and of preparation for heaven. It means that they would not be overwhelmed and confounded at the coming of the Saviour, by its being then found that all their hopes were fallacious. ¶ *And not be ashamed before him at his coming.* By having all our hopes taken away; by being held up to the universe as guilty and condemned. We feel ashamed when our hopes are disappointed; when it is shown that we have a character different from what we professed to have; when our pretensions to goodness are stripped off, and the heart is made bare. Many will thus be ashamed in the last day, (Matt. vii. 21–23;) but it is one of the promises made to those who truly believe on the Saviour, that they shall never be ashamed or confounded. See Notes on 1 Pet. ii. 6. Comp. Isa. xlv. 17; Rom. v. 5; 1 Pet. iv. 16; Mark viii. 38.

29. *If ye know that he is righteous.*

This is not said as if there could be any doubt on the subject, but merely to call their attention to it as a well-known truth, and to state what followed from it. Every one who has any true acquaintance with God, must have the fullest conviction that he is a righteous Being. But, if this be so, John says, then it must follow that only those who are truly righteous can regard themselves as begotten of him. ¶ *Ye know.* Marg., *know ye.* The Greek will bear either construction, and either would make good sense. Assuming that God is righteous, it would be proper to state, as in the text, that it followed from this that they must know that only those who are righteous can be regarded as

teous, <sup>1</sup>ye know that <sup>a</sup>every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

a Je. 13. 23; Mat. 7. 16–18.

begotten of him; or, assuming this to be true, it was proper to exhort them to be righteous, as in the margin. Whichever interpretation is adopted, the great truth is taught, that only those who are truly righteous can regard themselves as the children of God. ¶ *That every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.* Or rather, *is begotten of him*; is truly a child of God. This truth is everywhere taught in the Bible, and is worthy of being often repeated. No one who is not, in the proper sense of the term, a righteous man, can have any well-founded pretensions to being regarded as a child of God. If this be so, then it is not difficult to determine whether we are the children of God. (1.) If we are unjust, false, dishonest, we cannot be his children. (2.) If we are indulging in any known sin, we cannot be. (3.) If we are not truly righteous, all visions and rapture, all zeal and ardour, though in the cause of religion, all that we may pride ourselves on in being fervent in prayer, or eloquent in preaching, is vain. (4.) If we are righteous, in the true and proper sense, doing that which is *right* toward God and toward men, to ourselves, to our families, to our neighbours, to the world at large, to the Saviour who died for us, then we are true Christians; and then, no matter how soon he may appear, or how solemn and overwhelming the scenes that shall close the world, we shall not be ashamed or confounded, for we shall hail him as our Saviour, and rejoice that the time has come that we may go and dwell with him for ever.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

THIS chapter embraces the following subjects:—

I. The fact that Christians are now the sons of God, vers. 1–3. (1.) We are the sons of God, and this will explain the reason why the world does not appreciate our character, or understand the reasons of our conduct, ver. 1. (2.) The consequences of sustaining that re-

## CHAPTER III.

**B**EHOLD, what manner of love  
<sup>a</sup> the Father hath bestowed  
 upon us, that we should be called

the sons <sup>b</sup> of God! therefore the  
 world <sup>c</sup> knoweth us not, because it  
 knew him not.

<sup>a</sup> Ep. 2.4,5.

<sup>b</sup> Jn. 1.13; Re. 21.7.

<sup>c</sup> Jn. 17.22.

lation to God, or of being regarded as his sons. (a) We shall be like him when he appears, ver. 2. (b) We shall purify ourselves under the influence of this hope, ver. 3.

II. The fact that he who is an adopted child of God does not commit sin, vers. 4-10. (1.) All sin is the transgression of the law, ver. 4; (2.) Christ was manifested to take away our sins, ver. 5; (3.) he that commits sin is of the devil, ver. 8; and, (4.) as a matter of fact, he who is of God does *not* commit sin, vers. 7, 9, 10.

III. True religion will be manifested by love to the Christian brotherhood, vers. 10-18. (1.) As a man who is not righteous cannot be a true Christian, neither can he who does not love his brother, ver. 10. (2.) It is the solemn command of the Saviour that his followers should love one another, vers. 11. (3.) The importance of this is seen by the opposite conduct of Cain, ver. 12. (4.) Love to the brethren furnishes the most certain evidence that we have passed from death unto life, ver. 14. (5.) A man who hates another is in fact a murderer, and, of course, cannot be a true child of God, ver. 15. (6.) We should be stimulated to the love of the brethren by the example of the Saviour, who laid down his life for us, ver. 16. (7.) If we see a brother in want, and have the means of aiding him, and do not do it, we cannot have the love of God dwelling in us, vers. 17, 18.

IV. We may have evidence that we love God by the consciousness of our feelings towards him, as well as by outward acts towards his friends, vers. 19-21.

V. If we keep his commandments our prayers will be answered, vers. 22, 23. (1.) There is an assurance that we shall receive what we need if we ask it, and keep his commandments, ver. 22. (2.) The particular commandments on which the efficacy of prayer so much depends, are (a) that we believe on the name of the Saviour, and (b) that we love the Christian brotherhood, ver. 23.

VI. We may know that we abide in God by the spirit which he has given us, as well as by keeping his commandments, ver. 24.

This chapter, therefore, is occupied mainly with stating what are the evidences of true piety; and, in order to determine this question, there is perhaps no part of the Bible that may be studied with more profit than this portion of the writings of John.

1. *Behold, what manner of love.* What love, in *kind* and in *degree*. In *kind* the most tender and the most ennobling, in adopting us into his family, and in permitting us to address him as our Father; in *degree* the most exalted, since there is no higher love that can be shown than in adopting a poor and friendless orphan, and giving him a parent and a home. Even God could bestow upon us no more valuable token of affection than that we should be adopted into his family, and permitted to regard him as our Father. When we remember how insignificant we are as creatures, and how ungrateful, rebellious, and vile we have been as sinners, we may well be amazed at the love which would adopt us into the holy family of God, so that we may be regarded and treated as the children of the Most High. A prince could manifest no higher love for a wandering, ragged, vicious orphan boy, found in the streets, than by adopting him into his own family, and admitting him to the same privileges and honours as his own sons; and yet this would be a trifle compared with the honour which God has bestowed on us. ¶ *The Father hath bestowed upon us.* God, regarded as a Father, or as at the head of the universe considered as one family. ¶ *That we should be called the sons of God.* That is, that we should be the sons of God—the word *called* being often used in the sense of *to be*. On the nature and privileges of adoption, see Notes, Rom. viii. 15-17, and 2 Cor. vi. 18, and practical remarks on that chapter, 19 20 ¶ *Therefore the*



2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be

a Ro. 8.14, 18.      b 1 Co. 15.49; Phil. 3.21; 2 Pe. 1.4.  
c Job 19.26; Ps. 17.15; Mat. 5.8; 1 Co. 13.12.

*world knoweth us not.* Does not understand our principles; the reasons of our conduct; the sources of our comforts and joys. The people of the world regard us as fanatics or enthusiasts; as foolish in abandoning the pleasures and pursuits which they engage in; as renouncing certain happiness for that which is uncertain; as cherishing false and delusive hopes in regard to the future, and as practising needless austerities, with nothing to compensate for the pleasures which are abandoned. There is nothing which the gay, the ambitious, and the selfish *less* understand than they do the elements which go into the Christian's character, and the nature and source of the Christian's joys. ¶ *Because it knew him not.* Did not know the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, the world had no right views of the real character of the Lord Jesus when he was on the earth. They mistook him for an enthusiast or an impostor; and it is no wonder that, having wholly mistaken his character, they should mistake ours. On the fact that the world did not know him, see Notes, 1 Cor. ii. 8; Acts iii. 17. Comp. John xvii. 25. On the fact that Christians may be expected to be regarded and treated as their Saviour was, see Notes on John xv. 18-20. Comp. Matt. x. 24, 25.

2. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God.* We now in fact sustain this rank and dignity, and on that we may reflect with pleasure and gratitude. It is in itself an exalted honour, and may be contemplated as such, whatever may be true in regard to what is to come. In the dignity and the privileges which we now enjoy, we may find a grateful subject of reflection, and a cause of thankfulness, even if we should look to nothing beyond, or when we contemplate the fact by itself. ¶ *And it doth not yet appear what we shall be.* It is not fully revealed what we shall be hereafter; what will be the full result of being regarded as the children of

like him; <sup>b</sup> for we shall see <sup>a</sup> him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

God. There are, indeed, certain things which may be inferred as following from this. There is enough to animate us with hope, and to sustain us in the trials of life. There is *one* thing which is clear, that we shall be like the Son of God; but what is fully involved in this is not made known. Perhaps (1) it could not be so revealed that we could understand it, for that state may be so unlike the present that no words would fully convey the conception to our minds. Perhaps (2) it may be necessary to our condition here, as on probation, that no more light should be furnished in regard to the future than to stimulate us to make efforts to reach a world where all is light. For an illustration of the sentiment expressed here by the apostle, comp. Notes on 2 Pet. i. 4. ¶ *But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him.* It is revealed to us that we shall be made like Christ; that is, in the bodies with which we shall be raised up, in character, in happiness, in glory. Comp. Notes, Phil. iii. 21; 2 Cor. iii. 18. This is enough to satisfy the Christian in his prospects for the future world. To be like Christ is the object of his supreme aim. For that he lives, and all his aspirations in regard to the coming world may be summed up in this—that he wishes to be like the glorified Son of God, and to share his honours and his joys. See Notes, Phil. iii. 10. ¶ *For we shall see him as he is.* It is clearly implied here that there will be an influence in beholding the Saviour as he is, which will tend to make us like him, or to transform us into his likeness. See the nature of this influence explained in the Notes on 2 Cor. iii. 18.

3. *And every man that hath this hope in him.* This hope of seeing the Saviour, and of being made like him; that is, every true Christian. On the nature and influence of hope, see Notes on Rom. viii. 24, 25. ¶ *Purifieth him-*

4 Whosoever committeth sin

transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

*self.* Makes himself holy. That is, under the influence of this hope of being like the Saviour, he puts forth those efforts in struggling against sin, and in overcoming his evil propensities, which are necessary to make him pure. The apostle would not deny that for the success of these efforts we are dependent on Divine aid; but he brings into view, as is often done in the sacred writings, the agency of man himself as essentially connected with success. Comp. Phil. ii. 12. The particular thought here is, that the hope of being like Christ, and of being permitted to dwell with him, will lead a man to earnest efforts to become holy, and will be actually followed by such a result. ¶ *Even as he is pure.* The same *kind* of purity here, the same *degree* hereafter. That is, the tendency of such a hope is to make him holy now, though he may be imperfect; the effect will be to make him *perfectly* holy in the world to come. It cannot be shown from this passage that the apostle meant to teach that any one actually becomes as pure in the present life as the Saviour is, that is, becomes perfectly holy; for all that is fairly implied in it is, that those who have this hope in them *aim* at the same purity, and will *ultimately* obtain it. But the apostle does not say that it is attained in this world. If the passage *did* teach this, it would teach it respecting *every* one who has this hope, and then the doctrine would be that no one can be a Christian who does not become absolutely perfect on earth; that is, not that some Christians *may* become perfect here, but that all actually *do*. But none, it is presumed, will hold this to be a true doctrine. A true Christian does not, indeed, habitually and willfully sin; but no one can pretend that all Christians attain to a state of sinless perfection on earth, or are, in fact, *as* pure as the Saviour was. But unless the passage proves that *every* Christian becomes absolutely perfect in the present life, it does not prove that in fact *any* do. It proves (1) that the tendency, or the fair influence of this hope, is to make the Christian pure; (2)

that all who cherish it will, in fact, *aim* to become as holy as the Saviour was; and (3) that this object will, at some future period, be accomplished. There is a world where all who are redeemed shall be perfectly holy.

4. *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law.* The law of God given to man as a rule of life. The object of the apostle here is to excite them to holiness, and to deter them from committing sin, perhaps in view of the fact stated in ver. 3, that every one who has the hope of heaven will aim to be holy like the Saviour. To confirm this, he shows them that, as a matter of fact, those who are born of God *do* lead lives of obedience, (vers. 5—10;) and this he introduces by showing what is the nature of sin, in the verse before us. The considerations by which he would deter them from indulging in sin are the following: (a) all sin is a violation of the law of God, ver. 4; (b) the very object of the coming of Christ was to deliver men from sin, ver. 5; (c) those who are true Christians do not habitually sin, ver. 6; (d) those who sin cannot be true Christians, but are of the devil, ver. 8; and (e) he who is born of God has a germ or principle of true piety in him, and cannot sin, ver. 9. It seems evident that the apostle is here combating an opinion which then existed that men might sin, and yet be true Christians, (ver. 7;) and he apprehended that there was danger that this opinion would become prevalent. On what *ground* this opinion was held is unknown. Perhaps it was held that all that was necessary to constitute religion was to embrace the doctrines of Christianity, or to be orthodox in the faith; perhaps that it was not expected that men would become holy in this life, and therefore they might indulge in acts of sin; perhaps that Christ came to modify and relax the law, and that the *freedom* which he procured for them was freedom to indulge in whatever men chose; perhaps that, since Christians were heirs of all things, they had a right to enjoy all things; perhaps that the passions of

men were so strong that they could not be restrained, and that therefore it was not wrong to give indulgence to the propensities with which our Creator has formed us. All these opinions have been held under various forms of Antinomianism, and it is not at all improbable that some or all of them prevailed in the time of John. The argument which he urges would be applicable to any of them. The consideration which he here states is, that all sin is a transgression of law, and that he who commits it, under whatever pretence, is to be held as a transgressor of the law. The literal rendering of this passage is, 'He who doeth sin (*ἁμαρτίαν*) doeth also transgression'—*ἀνομίαν*. Sin is the generic term embracing all that would be wrong. The word transgression (*ἀνομία*) is a specific term, showing where the wrong lay, to wit, in violating the law. ¶ *For sin is the transgression of the law.* That is, all sin involves this as a consequence that it is a violation of the law. The object of the apostle is not so much to define sin, as to deter from its commission by stating what is its essential nature—though he has in fact given the best definition of it that could be given. The essential idea is, that God has given a law to men to regulate their conduct, and that whatever is a departure from that law in any way is held to be sin. The law measures our duty, and measures therefore the degree of guilt when it is not obeyed. The law determines what is right in all cases, and, of course, what is wrong when it is not complied with. The law is the expression of what is the will of God as to what we shall do; and when that is not done, there is sin. The law determines what we shall love or not love; when our passions and appetites shall be bounded and restrained, and to what extent they may be indulged; what shall be our motives and aims in living; how we shall act toward God and toward men; and whenever, in any of these respects, its requirements are not complied with, there is sin. This will include everything in relation to which the law is given, and will embrace what we *omit* to do when the law has commanded a thing to be done, as well as a

*positive* act of transgression where the law has forbidden a thing. This idea is properly found in the original word rendered *transgression of the law*—*ἀνομία*. This word occurs in the New Testament only in the following places: Matt. vii. 23; xiii. 41; xxiii. 28; xxiv. 12; Rom. iv. 7; vi. 19; 2 Thess. ii. 7; Titus ii. 14; Heb. i. 9; viii. 12; x. 17, in all which places it is rendered *iniquity* and *iniquities*; in 2 Cor. vi. 14, where it is rendered *unrighteousness*; and in the verse before us twice. It properly means *lawlessness*, in the sense that the requirements of the law are not conformed to, or complied with; that is, either by not obeying it, or by positively violating it. When a parent commands a child to do a thing, and he does not do it, he is as really guilty of violating the law as when he does a thing which is positively forbidden. This important verse, therefore, may be considered in two aspects—as a definition of the nature of sin, and as an argument against indulgence in it, or against committing it. I. As a definition of the nature of sin. It teaches (a) that there is a rule of law by which the conduct of mankind is to be regulated and governed, and to which it is to be conformed. (b) That there is sin in all cases where that law is not complied with; and that all who do *not* comply with it are guilty before God. (c) That the particular thing which determines the guilt of sin, and which measures it, is that it is a departure from law, and consequently that there is no sin where there is no departure from law. The essential thing is, that the law has not been respected and obeyed, and sin derives its character and aggravation from that fact. No one can reasonably doubt as to the *accuracy* of this definition of sin. It is founded on the fact (a) that God has an absolute right to prescribe what we may and may not do; (b) that it is to be presumed that what he prescribes will be in accordance with what is right; and (c) that nothing else in fact constitutes sin. Sin can consist in nothing else. It does not consist of a particular height of stature, or a particular complexion; of a feeble intellect, or an intellect *made* feeble, as the

5 And ye know <sup>a</sup> that he was

<sup>a</sup> He. 9. 26, 28.

manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

result of any former apostasy; of any constitutional propensity, or any disposition founded in our nature as creatures. For none of these things do our consciences condemn us; and however we may lament them, we have no consciousness of wrong.

[In these remarks the author has in view the doctrine of original sin, or imputed sin, which he thinks as absurd as sin of stature or complexion. His views will be found at large in the Notes on Rom. v. throughout, and by comparing these with the Supplementary Notes on the same place, the reader will be able to form his own opinion. There does not seem to be anything affecting the point in this passage.]

II. As an argument against the commission of sin. This argument may be considered as consisting of two things—the wrong that is done by the violation of law, and the exposure to the penalty.

(1.) The wrong itself. This wrong, as an argument to deter from sin, arises mainly from two things: (a) because sin is a violation of the will of God, and it is in itself wrong to disregard that will; and (b) because it is to be presumed that when God has given law there is a good reason why he has done it.

(2.) The fact that the law has a penalty is an argument for not violating the law. All law has a penalty; that is, there is some suffering, disadvantage, forfeit of privileges, &c., which the violation of law draws in its train, and which is to be regarded as an expression of the sense which the lawgiver entertains of the value of his law, and of the evil of disobeying it. Many of these penalties of the violation of the Divine law are seen in this life, and all will be certain to occur sooner or later, in this world or in the world to come. With such views of the law and of sin—of his obligations, and of the evils of disobedience—a Christian should not, and will not, deliberately and habitually violate the law of God.

5. And ye know that he was manifested. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God. 'You know that he became incarnate, or appeared among men, for the very purpose of putting an end to

sin,' Matt. i. 21. Comp. Notes, 1 Tim. iii. 16. This is the *second* argument in this paragraph, (vers. 4–10,) by which the apostle would deter us from sin. The argument is a clear one, and is perhaps the strongest that can be made to bear on the mind of a true Christian—that the Lord Jesus saw sin to be so great an evil, that he came into our world, and gave himself to the bitter sorrows of death on the cross, to redeem us from it. ¶ *To take away our sins.*

The essential argument here is, that the whole work of Christ was designed to deliver us from the dominion of sin, not to furnish us the means of indulgence in it; and that, therefore, we should be deterred from it by all that Christ has done and suffered for us. He perverts the whole design of the coming of the Saviour who supposes that his work was in any degree designed to procure for his followers the indulgences of sin, or who so interprets the methods of his grace as to suppose that it is now lawful for him to indulge his guilty passions. The argument essentially is this: (1.) That we profess to be the followers of Christ, and should carry out his ends and views in coming into the world; (2.) that the great and leading purpose of his coming was to set us free from the bondage of transgression; (3.) that in doing this he gave himself up to a life of poverty, and shame, and sorrow, and to a most bitter death on the cross; and, (4.) that we should not indulge in that from which he came to deliver us, and which cost him so much toil and such a death. How could we indulge in that which has brought heavy calamity on the head of a father, or which has pierced a sister's heart with many sorrows? Still more, how can we be so ungrateful and hardhearted as to indulge in that which crushed our Redeemer in death? ¶ *And in him is no sin.* An additional consideration to show that we should be holy. As he was perfectly pure and spotless, so should all his followers aim to be; and none can truly pretend to be his who do not desire and design to become like him. On the

6 Whosoever abideth in him sin-

<sup>a</sup> 3 Jn. 11.

neth not: whosoever <sup>a</sup> sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him.

personal holiness of the Lord Jesus, see Notes on Heb. vii. 26, and 1 Pet. ii. 23.

6. *Whosoever abideth in him.* See chap. ii. 6. The word here employed (*μὴναι*) properly means to remain, to continue, to abide. It is used of persons remaining or dwelling in a place, in the sense of abiding there permanently, or lodging there, and this is the common meaning of the word, Matt. x. 11; xxvi. 38; Mark vi. 10; Luke i. 56, *et sæpe*. In the writings of John, however, it is quite a favourite word to denote the *relation* which one sustains to another, in the sense of being united to him, or remaining with him in affection and love; being with him in heart and mind and will, as one makes his home in a dwelling. The sense seems to be that we have some sort of relation to him similar to that which we have to our home; that is, some fixed and permanent attachment to him. We live in him; we remain steadfast in our attachment to him, as we do to our own home. For the use of the word in John, in whose writings it so frequently occurs, see John v. 38; vi. 56; xiv. 10, 17; xv. 4-7, 9; 1 John ii. 6, 10, 14, 17, 27, 28; iii. 6, 24; iv. 12, 13, 15, 16. In the passage before us, as in his writings generally, it refers to one who lives the life of a Christian, as if he were always with Christ, and abode with him. It refers to the Christian considered as adhering steadfastly to the Saviour, and not as following him with transitory feelings, emotions, and raptures.

[See the Supplementary Note, Rom. viii. 10. We abide in Christ by union with him. The phrase expresses the *continuance* of the union; of which see in the Note as above. Scott explains, 'whoever abides in Christ as one with him and as maintaining communion with him.']

It does not of itself necessarily mean that he will always do this; that is, it does not *prove* the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but it refers to the adherence to the Saviour as a *continuous* state of mind, or as having permanency; meaning that there is a life of continued faith in him. It is of a person thus attached to the Saviour that

the apostle makes the important declaration in the passage before us, that he does not sin. This is the *third* argument to show that the child of God should be pure; and the substance of the argument is, that *as a matter of fact* the child of God is not a sinner. ¶ *Sinneth not.* There has been much difference of opinion in regard to this expression, and the similar declaration in ver. 9. Not a few have maintained that it teaches the 'doctrine of perfection,' or that Christians may live entirely without sin; and some have held that the apostle meant to teach that this is always the characteristic of the true Christian. Against the interpretation, however, which supposes that it teaches that the Christian is absolutely perfect, and lives wholly without sin, there are three insuperable objections: (1.) If it teaches that doctrine at all, it teaches that *all* Christians are perfect; '*whosoever* abideth in him,' '*whosoever* is born of God,' 'he *cannot* sin,' ver. 9. (2.) This is not true, and cannot be held to be true by those who have any just views of what the children of God have been and are. Who can maintain that Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob; that Moses, David, or Job; that Peter, John, or Paul, were absolutely perfect, and were never, after their regeneration, guilty of an act of sin? Certainly they never affirmed it of themselves, nor does the sacred record attribute to them any such perfection. And who can affirm this of *all* who give evidence of true piety in the world? Who can of themselves? Are we to come to the painful conclusion that all who are not absolutely perfect in thought, word, and deed, are destitute of any religion, and are to be set down as hypocrites or self-deceivers? And yet, unless this passage proves that *all* who have been born again are absolutely perfect, it will not prove it of any one, for the affirmation is not made of a part, or of what any favoured individual may be, but of what every one is in fact who is born of God. (3.) This interpretation is not necessary to a fair exposition of the passage. The language used is such

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he <sup>a</sup> that doeth righ-

<sup>a</sup> *Exe. 18.5-9; Ro. 2.13.*

teousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

as would be employed by any writer if he designed to say of one that he is not characteristically a sinner; that he is a good man; that he does not commit habitual and wilful transgression. Such language is common throughout the Bible, when it is said of one man that he is a saint, and of another that he is a sinner; of one that he is righteous, and of another that he is wicked; of one that he obeys the law of God, and of another that he does not. John expresses it strongly, but he affirms no more in fact than is affirmed elsewhere. The passage teaches, indeed, most important truths in regard to the true Christian; and the fair and proper meaning may be summed up in the following particulars: (a) He who is born again does not sin *habitually*, or is not *habitually* a sinner. If he does wrong, it is when he is overtaken by temptation, and the act is against the habitual inclination and purpose of his soul. If a man sins habitually, it proves that he has never been renewed. (b) That he who is born again does not do wrong *deliberately* and of *design*. He means to do right. He is not wilfully and deliberately a sinner. If a man deliberately and intentionally does wrong, he shows that he is not actuated by the spirit of religion. It is true that when one does wrong, or commits sin, there is a momentary assent of the will; but it is under the influence of passion, or excitement, or temptation, or provocation, and not as the result of a deliberate plan or purpose of the soul. A man who deliberately and intentionally does a wrong thing, shows that he is not a true Christian; and if this were all that is understood by *perfection*, then there would be many who are perfect, for there are many, very many Christians, who cannot recollect an instance for many years in which they have intentionally and deliberately done a wrong thing. Yet these very Christians see much corruption in their own hearts over which to mourn, and against which they earnestly strive; in comparing themselves with the perfect law of God, and

with the perfect example of the Saviour, they see much in which they come short. (c) He who is born again will not sin *finally*, or will not fall away. 'His seed remaineth in him,' ver. 9. See Notes on that verse. There is a principle of grace by which he will ultimately be restrained and recovered. This, it seems to me, is fairly implied in the language used by John; for if a man might be a Christian, and yet wholly fall away and perish, how could it be said with any truth that such a man 'sinneth not'; how that 'he doth not commit sin'; how that 'his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin?' Just the contrary would be true if this were so. ¶ *Whosoever sinneth*. That is, as explained above, habitually, deliberately, characteristically, and finally. —*Doddridge*. 'Who habitually and avowedly sinneth.' ¶ *He hath not seen him, nor known him*. Has had no just views of the Saviour, or of the nature of true religion. In other words, cannot be a true Christian.

7. *Little children*. Notes on chap. ii. 1. ¶ *Let no man deceive you*. That is, in the matter under consideration; to wit, by persuading you that a man may live in sinful practices, and yet be a true child of God. From this it is clear that the apostle supposed there were some who would attempt to do this, and it was to counteract their arts that he made these positive statements in regard to the nature of true religion. ¶ *He that doeth righteousness is righteous*. This is laid down as a great and undeniable principle in religion—a maxim which none could dispute, and as important as it is plain. And it is worthy of all the emphasis which the apostle lays on it. The man who does righteousness, or leads an upright life, is a righteous man, and no other one is. No matter how any one may claim that he is justified by faith; no matter how he may conform to the external duties and rites of religion; no matter how zealous he may be for orthodoxy, or for the order of the church; no matter what visions and raptures he may have,

8 He <sup>a</sup> that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that <sup>b</sup> he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever <sup>c</sup> is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed <sup>d</sup> remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 8.44.

<sup>b</sup> He 2.14.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Jn. 5.18.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Pe. 1.23.

or of what peace and joy in his soul he may boast; no matter how little he may fear death, or hope for heaven—unless he is in fact a righteous man, in the proper sense of the term, he cannot be a child of God. Compare Matt. vii. 16—23. If he is, in the proper sense of the word, a man who keeps the law of God, and leads a holy life, he is righteous, for that is religion. Such a man, however, will always feel that his claim to be regarded as a righteous man is not to be traced to what he is in himself, but to what he owes to the grace of God. ¶ *Even as he is righteous.* See notes on ver. 3. Not necessarily in this world to the same *degree*, but with the same *kind* of righteousness. Hereafter he will become wholly free from all sin, like his God and Saviour, ver. 2.

8. *He that committeth sin.* Habitually, wilfully, characteristically. ¶ *Is of the devil.* This cannot mean that no one who commits *any* sin, or who is not absolutely perfect, can be a Christian, for this would cut off the great mass, even according to the belief of those who hold that the Christian may be perfectly holy, from all claim to the Christian character. But what the apostle here says is true in two senses: (1.) That all who commit sin, even true believers, so far as they are imperfect, in this respect resemble Satan, and are under his influence, since sin, just so far as it exists at all, makes us resemble him. (2.) All who habitually and characteristically sin are of the devil. This latter was evidently the principal idea in the mind of the apostle. His *object* here is to show that those who sinned, in the sense in which it would seem some maintained that the children of God might sin, could have no real evidence of piety, but really belonged to Satan. ¶ *For the devil sinneth from the beginning.* The beginning of the world; or from the first account we have of him. It does not

mean that he sinned from the beginning of his existence, for he was made holy like the other angels. Notes, Jude 6. The meaning is, that he introduced sin into the universe, and that he has continued to practise it ever since. The word *sinneth* here implies *continued* and *habitual* sin. He did not commit one act of sin and then reform; but he has continued, and still continues, his course of sin. This may confirm what has been already said about the kind of sin that John refers to. He speaks of sinning habitually, continuously, wilfully; and any one who does this shows that he is under the influence of him whose characteristic it has been and is to sin. ¶ *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested.* Became incarnate, and appeared among men, ver. 5. Comp. Notes on 1 Tim. iii. 16. ¶ *That he might destroy the works of the devil.* All his plans of wickedness, and his control over the hearts of men. Compare notes on Matt. viii. 39; Mark i. 24; Heb. ii. 14. The *argument* here is, that as the Son of God came to destroy all the works of the devil, he cannot be his true follower who lives in sin.

9. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.* This passage must either mean that they who are born of God, that is, who are true Christians, do not sin habitually and characteristically, or that every one who is a true Christian is absolutely perfect, and never commits any sin. If it can be used as referring to the doctrine of absolute perfection at all, it proves, not that Christians *may* be perfect, or that a *portion* of them are, but that *all* are. But who can maintain this? Who can believe that John meant to affirm this? Nothing can be clearer than that the passage has *not* this meaning, and that John did not teach a doctrine so contrary to the current strain of the Scriptures, and to fact; and if he did not teach this,

10 In this the children of God are

then in this whole passage he refers to those who are habitually and characteristically righteous. ¶ *For his seed remaineth in him.* There is much obscurity in this expression, though the general sense is clear, which is, that there is something abiding in the heart of the true Christian which the apostle here calls *seed*, which will prevent his sinning. The word '*his*' in this phrase, '*his seed*,' may refer either to the individual himself—in the sense that this can now be properly called *his*, inasmuch as it is a part of himself, or a principle abiding in him; or it may refer to God—in the sense that what is here called '*seed*' is *his*, that is, he has implanted it, or it is a germ of Divine origin. Robinson (*Lex.*) understands it in the latter sense, and so also do Macknight, Doddridge, Lücke, and others, and this is probably the true interpretation. The word *seed* (*σπέρμα*) means properly seed sown, as of grain, plants, trees; then anything that resembles it, anything which germinates, or which springs up, or is produced. It is applied in the New Testament to the word of God, or the gospel, as that which produces effects in the heart and life similar to what seed that is sown does. Comp. Matt. xiii. 26, 37, 38. Augustin, Clemens, (*Alex.*) Grotius, Rosenmüller, Benson, and Bloomfield, suppose that this is the signification of the word here. The proper idea, according to this, is that the seed referred to is truth, which God has implanted or sown in the heart, from which it may be expected that the fruits of righteousness will grow. But that which abides in the heart of a Christian is not the naked word of God; the mere gospel, or mere truth; it is rather that word as made vital and efficacious by the influences of his Spirit; the germ of the Divine life; the principles of true piety in the soul. Comp. the words of Virgil:—*Ignæ est illi vigor et cœlestis origo semini.* The exact idea here, as it seems to me, is not that the '*seed*' refers to the word of God, as Augustin and others suppose, or to the Spirit of God, but to the germ of piety which has been produced in the heart by the word and

manifest, and the children of the

Spirit of God, and which may be regarded as having been implanted there by God himself, and which may be expected to produce holiness in the life. There is, probably, as Lücke supposes, an allusion in the word to the fact that we are *begotten* (*ἐγεννημένους*) of God. The word *remaineth*—*μένει*, comp. Notes on ver. 6—is a favourite expression of John. The expression here used by John, thus explained, would seem to imply two things: (1,) that the germ or seed of religion implanted in the soul abides there as a constant, vital principle, so that he who is born of God cannot become habitually a sinner; and, (2,) that it will so continue to live there that he will not fall away and perish. The idea is clearly that the germ or principle of piety so permanently abides in the soul, that he who is renewed never can become again characteristically a sinner. ¶ *And he cannot sin.* Not merely he will not, but he cannot; that is, in the sense referred to. This cannot mean that one who is renewed has not physical ability to do wrong, for every moral agent has; nor can it mean that no one who is a true Christian ever does, in fact, do wrong in thought, word, or deed, for no one could seriously maintain that: but it must mean that there is somehow a certainty as absolute as if it were physically impossible, that those who are born of God will not be characteristically and habitually sinners; that they will not sin in such a sense as to lose all true religion and be numbered with transgressors; that they will not fall away and perish. Unless this passage teaches that no one who is renewed ever *can* sin in any sense; or that every one who becomes a Christian is, and must be, absolutely and always perfect, no words could more clearly prove that true Christians will never fall from grace and perish. How can what the apostle here says be true, if a real Christian can fall away and become again a sinner? ¶ *Because he is born of God.* Or *begotten* of God. God has given him, by the new birth, real, spiritual life, and that life can never become extinct.

10. In this the children of God are manifest, &c. That is, this furnishes a



devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

11 For this is the <sup>1</sup> message that ye heard from the beginning, that <sup>a</sup> we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, <sup>b</sup> who was of that

wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world <sup>c</sup> hate you.

<sup>1</sup> Or, *commandment*.

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 15. 12.

<sup>b</sup> Ge. 4. 4-8.

<sup>c</sup> Jn. 15. 18, 19.

test of their true character. The test is found in doing righteousness, and in the love of the brethren. The former he had illustrated; the latter he now proceeds to illustrate. The general idea is, that if a man is not truly a righteous man, and does not love the brethren, he cannot be a child of God. Perhaps by the phrase '*in this*,' using a pronoun in the singular number, he means to intimate that an important part of righteousness consists in brotherly love. ¶ *Whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God.* In ver. 7, he had said that 'he that doeth righteousness is of God.'

If that is true, then what he here affirms must be true also, that a man who does *not* righteousness is not of God. The general idea is the same, that no one can be a true Christian who is not in fact a righteous man. ¶ *Neither he that loveth not his brother.* The illustration of this point continues to ver. 18. The general sense is, that brotherly love is essential to the Christian character, and that he who does not possess it cannot be a Christian. On the nature and importance of brotherly love as an evidence of piety, see Notes on John xiii. 34, 35.

11. *For this is the message.* Marg., *commandment*. In the received text, this is ἀγγελία—a message brought; in several mss., and in later editions, it is κηρυγμία—annunciation, announcement; an order given, or a commandment, Acts xxiii. 21. It is not very material which reading is followed. The word *command* or *rule* would express the sense with sufficient clearness. The reference is to the law given by the Saviour as a permanent direction to his disciples. ¶ *That ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* See Notes, John xiii. 34, 35; 1 John ii. 7.

12. *Not as Cain.* Not manifesting

the spirit which Cain did. His was a most remarkable and striking instance of a want of love to a brother, and the case was well adapted to illustrate the propriety of the duty which the apostle is enjoining. See Gen. iv. 4-8. ¶ *Who was of that wicked one.* Of the devil; that is, he was under his influence, and acted from his instigation. ¶ *And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.* He acted under the influence of envy. He was dissatisfied that his own offering was not accepted, and that his brother's was. The apostle seems desirous to guard those to whom he wrote against the indulgence of any feelings that were the opposite of love; from anything like envy toward more highly favoured brethren, by showing to what this would lead if fairly acted out, as in the case of Cain. A large part of the crimes of the earth have been caused, as in the murder of Abel, by the want of brotherly love. Nothing but love would be necessary to put an end to the crimes, and consequently to a large part of the misery, of the world.

13. *Marvel not.* Do not think it so unusual, or so little to be expected, as to excite astonishment. ¶ *If the world hate you.* The emphasis here is to be placed on the word *you*. The apostle had just adverted to the fact that Cain hated Abel, his brother, without cause, and he says that they were not to deem it strange if the world hated *them* in like manner. The Saviour (John xv. 17, 18) introduced these subjects in the same connection. In enjoining the duty of brotherly love on his disciples, he adverts to the fact that they must expect to be hated by the world, and tells them to remember that the world hated him before it hated them. The object of all this was to show more clearly the necessity of strong and tender mutual affec-

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He <sup>a</sup> that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever <sup>b</sup> hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that

<sup>a</sup> 1 Jn. 2.9, 11.

<sup>b</sup> Mat. 5.21, 22.

tion among Christians, since they could hope for none from the world. See Notes, John xv. 18, 19.

14. *We know that we have passed from death unto life.* From spiritual death (Notes, Eph. ii. 1) to spiritual life; that is, that we are true Christians. ¶ *Because we love the brethren.* The sentiment here is, that it is an infallible evidence of true piety if we love the followers of Christ as such. See this sentiment illustrated in the Notes on John xiii. 35. But how easy it would seem to be to apply such a test of piety as this! Who cannot judge accurately of his own feelings, and determine whether he loves a Christian because he bears the name and image of the Saviour—loves him the more just in proportion as he bears that image? Who cannot, if he chooses, look beyond the narrow bounds of his own sect, and determine whether he is pleased with the true Christian character wherever it may be found, and whether he would prefer to find his friends among those who bear the name and the image of the Son of God, than among the people of the world? The Saviour meant that his followers should be known by this badge of discipleship all over the world, John xiii. 34, 35. John says, in carrying out the sentiment, that Christians, by this test, may know *among themselves* whether they have any true religion. ¶ *He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* He remains dead in sins; that is, he has never been converted. Comp. Notes, ver. 6. As love to the Christian brotherhood is essential to true piety, it follows that he who has not that remains unconverted, or is in a state of spiritual death. He is by nature dead in sin, and unless he has evidence that he is brought out of that state, he *remains* or *abides* in it.

15. *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, &c.* That is, he has the

no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby <sup>a</sup> perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 15.13; Ro. 5.8.

spirit of a murderer; he has that which, if it were acted out, would lead him to commit murder, as it did Cain. The private malice, the secret grudge, the envy which is cherished in the heart, is murderous in its tendency, and were it not for the outward restraints of human laws, and the dread of punishment, it would often lead to the act of murder. The apostle does not say that he who hates his brother, though he does not in fact commit murder, is guilty to the same degree as if he had actually done it; but he evidently means to say that the spirit which would lead to murder is there, and that God will hold him responsible for it. Nothing is wanting but the removal of outward restraints to lead to the commission of the open deed, and God judges men as he sees them to be *in their hearts*. What a fearful declaration, then, is this! How many real murderers there are on the earth besides those who are detected and punished, and besides those open violators of the laws of God and man who go at large! And who is there that should not feel humbled and penitent in view of his own heart, and grateful for that sovereign mercy which has restrained him from open acts of guilt?—for who is there who has not at some period of his life, and perhaps often, indulged in feelings of hatred, and envy, and malice towards others, which, if acted out, would have led to the commission of the awful crime of taking human life? Any man may well shudder at the remembrance of the secret sins of his own heart, and at the thought of what he *would* have been but for the restraining grace of God. And how wonderful is that grace which, in the case of the true Christian, not only restrains and checks, but which effectually subdues all these feelings, and implants in their place the principles of love!

16. *Hereby perceive we the love of*

God. The words '*of God*' are not in the original, and should not have been introduced into the translation, though they are found in the Latin Vulgate, and in the Genevan versions, and in one manuscript. They would naturally convey the idea that *God* laid down his life for us; or that God himself, in his Divine nature, suffered. But this idea is not expressed in this passage as it is in the original, and of course no argument can be derived from it either to prove that Christ is God, or that the Divine nature is capable of suffering. The original is much more expressive and emphatic than it is with this addition: '*By this we know love*;' that is, we know what true love is; we see a most affecting and striking illustration of its nature. *Love itself*—its real nature, its power, its sacrifices, its influences—was seen in its highest form, when the Son of God gave himself to die on a cross. For an illustration of the sentiment, see Notes on John iii. 16, and xv. 13. ¶ *Because he laid down his life for us.* There can be no doubt that the Saviour is here referred to, though his name is not mentioned particularly. There are several instances in the New Testament where he is mentioned under the general appellation '*he*,' as one who was well known, and about whom the writers were accustomed to speak. ¶ *And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* For the good of our fellow-Christians, if it be necessary. That is, circumstances may occur where it would be proper to do it, and we ought always to be ready to do it. The spirit which led the Saviour to sacrifice his life for the good of the church, should lead us to do the same thing for our brethren if circumstances should require it. That this is a correct principle no one can doubt; for (1) the Saviour did it, and we are bound to imitate his example, and to possess his spirit; (2) the prophets, apostles, and martyrs did it, laying down their lives in the cause of truth, and for the good of the church and the world; and (3) it has always been held that it is right and proper, in certain circumstances, for a man to lay down his life for the good of others. So we speak of the patriot who sacrifices his life for the good of his country;

so we feel in the case of a shipwreck, that it may be the duty of a captain to sacrifice his life for the good of his passengers and crew; so in case of a pestilential disease, a physician should not regard his own life, if he may save others; and so we always hold the man up to honour who is willing to jeopard his own life on noble principles of self-denial for the good of his fellow-men. In what cases this should occur the apostle does not state; but the general principle would seem to be, that it is to be done when a greater good would result from our self-sacrifice than from carefully guarding our own lives. Thus, in the case of a patriot, his death, in the circumstances, might be of greater value to his country than his life would be; or, his exposing himself to death would be a greater service to his country, than if that should not be done. Thus the Saviour laid down his life for the good of mankind; thus the apostles exposed their lives to constant peril in extending the principles of religion; and thus the martyrs surrendered their lives in the cause of the church and of truth. In like manner we ought to be ready to hazard our lives, and even to lay them down, if in that way we may promote the cause of truth, and the salvation of sinners, or serve our Christian brethren. In what way this injunction was understood by the primitive Christians, may be perceived from what the world is reported to have said of them, '*Behold, how they love one another; they are ready to die for one another.*'—Tertull. Apol. c. 39. So Eusebius (Eccl. His. vii. 22) says of Christians, that '*in a time of plague they visited one another, and not only hazarded their lives, but actually lost them in their zeal to preserve the lives of others.*' We are not indeed to throw away our lives; we are not to expose them in a rash, reckless, imprudent manner; but when, in the discharge of duty, we are placed in a situation where life is exposed to danger, we are not to shrink from the duty, or to run away from it. Perhaps the following would embrace the principal instances of the duty here enjoined by the apostle: (1.) We ought to have such love for the church that we should be *willing* to die for it, as

17 But <sup>a</sup> whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of *compassion* from him, how <sup>b</sup> dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let <sup>c</sup> us not

love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby <sup>d</sup> we know that we are of the truth, and shall <sup>e</sup> assure our hearts before him.

<sup>a</sup> De.15.7. <sup>b</sup> 1 Jn.4.20. <sup>c</sup> Eze.33.31; Ro.12.9; Ja.2.15,16; 1 Pe.1.22. <sup>d</sup> 1 Jn.13.35. <sup>e</sup> 1 Or, persuade.

patriot is willing to die for his country. (2.) We ought to have such love for Christians as to be willing to jeopard our lives to aid them—as in case of a pestilence or plague, or when they are in danger by fire, or flood, or foes. (3.) We ought to have such love for the truth as to be willing to sacrifice our lives rather than deny it. (4.) We ought to have such love for the cause of our Master as to be willing to cross oceans, and snows, and sands; to visit distant and barbarous regions, though at imminent risk of our lives, and though with the prospect that we shall never see our country again. (5.) We ought to have such love for the church that we shall engage heartily and constantly in services of labour and self-sacrifice on its account, until, our work being done, exhausted nature shall sink to rest in the grave. In one word, we should regard ourselves as devoted to the service of the Redeemer, living or dying to be found engaged in his cause. If a case should actually occur where the question would arise whether a man would abandon his Christian brother or die, he ought not to hesitate; in all cases he should regard his life as consecrated to the cause of Sion and its friends. Once, in the times of primitive piety, there was much of this spirit in the world; how little, it is to be feared, does it prevail now!

17. *But whoso hath this world's good.* Has property—called 'this world's good,' or a good pertaining to this world, because it is of value to us only as it meets our wants this side of the grave; and perhaps also because it is sought supremely by the men of the world. The general meaning of this verse, in connection with the previous verse, is, that if we ought to be willing to lay down our lives for others, we ought to be willing to make those comparatively smaller sacrifices which are necessary to relieve them in their dis-

tresses; and that if we are unwilling to do this, we can have no evidence that the love of God dwells in us. ¶ *And seeth his brother have need.* Need of food, of raiment, of shelter; or sick, and poor, and unable to provide for his own wants and those of his family. ¶ *And shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him.* The bowels, or *upper viscera*, embracing the heart, and the region of the chest generally, are in the Scriptures represented as the seat of mercy, piety, and compassion, because when the mind feels compassion it is that part which is affected. Comp. Notes, Isa. xvi. 11. ¶ *How dwelleth the love of God in him?* How can a man love God who does not love those who bear his image? See Notes, chap. iv. 20. On the general sentiment here, see Notes on James ii. 14—16. The meaning is plain, that we cannot have evidence of piety unless we are ready to do good to others, especially to our Christian brethren. See Notes, Matt. xxv. 45; Gal. vi. 10.

18. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue.* By mere profession; by merely saying that we love each other. See 1 Pet. i. 22. ¶ *But in deed and in truth.* In such acts as shall show that our professed love is sincere and real. Let us do the deed of love, whether anything is said about it or not. See Notes on Matt. vi. 3.

19. *And hereby.* Gr., *by this*; that is, by the fact that we have true love to others, and that we manifest it by a readiness to make sacrifices to do them good. ¶ *We know that we are of the truth.* That we are not deceived in what we profess to be; that is, that we are true Christians. To be of the truth stands opposed to cherishing false and delusive hopes. ¶ *And shall assure our hearts before him.* Before God, or before the Saviour. In the margin, as in the Greek, the word rendered *shall assure*, is *persuade*. The Greek word

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

<sup>a</sup> Job 27. 8; Ps. 101. 3.

is used as meaning to *persuade*, e. g., to the reception and belief of truth; then to persuade any one who has unkind or prejudiced feelings towards us, or to bring over to kind feelings, to *conciliate*, and thus to pacify or quiet. The meaning here seems to be, that we shall in this way allay the doubts and trouble of our minds, and produce a state of quiet and peace, to wit, by the evidence that we are of the truth. Our consciences are often restless and troubled in view of past guilt; but, in thus furnishing the evidence of true piety by love to others, we shall pacify an accusing mind, and conciliate our own hearts, and persuade or convince ourselves that we are truly the children of God. See Rob. Lex. sub voce *πειθω*, I. b. In other words, though a man's heart may condemn him as guilty, and though he knows that God sees and condemns the sins of his past life, yet the agitations and alarms of his mind may be calmed down and soothed by evidence that he is a child of God, and that he will not be finally condemned. A true Christian does not attempt to conceal the fact that there is much for which his own heart and conscience might justly accuse him; but he finds, notwithstanding all this, evidence that he is a child of God, and he is persuaded that all will be well.

20. *For if our heart condemn us.* We cannot hope for peace from any expectation that our own hearts will never accuse us, or that we ourselves can approve of all that we have done. The reference here is not so much to our past lives, as to our present conduct and deportment. The object is to induce Christians so to live that their hearts will not condemn them for any secret sins, while the outward deportment may be unsullied. The general sentiment is, that if they should so live that their own hearts would condemn them for present insincerity and hypocrisy, they could have no hope of peace, for God knows all that is in the heart. In view of the past—when the heart accuses us of what we *have* done—we may find

21 Beloved, if our heart <sup>a</sup> condemn us not, *then* have we confidence <sup>b</sup> toward God.

<sup>b</sup> Ho. 10. 22.

peace by such evidences of piety as shall allay the troubles of an agitated soul, (ver. 9,) but we cannot have such peace if our hearts condemn us for the indulgence of secret sins, now that we profess to be Christians. If our hearts condemn us for present insincerity, and for secret sins, we can never 'persuade' or soothe them by any external act of piety. In view of the consciousness of past guilt, we may find peace; we can find none if there is a present purpose to indulge in sin. ¶ *God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.* We cannot hope to find peace by hiding anything from his view, or by any supposition that he is not acquainted with the sins for which our consciences trouble us. He knows all the sins of which we are conscious, and sees all their guilt and aggravation as clearly as we do. He knows more than this. He knows all the sins which we have forgotten; all those acts which we endeavour to persuade ourselves are not sinful, but which are evil in his sight; and all those aggravations attending our sins which it is impossible for us fully and distinctly to conceive. He is more disposed to condemn sin than we are; he looks on it with less allowance than we do. We cannot hope, then, for a calm mind in any supposition that God does not see our sins as clearly as we do, or in any hope that he will look on them with more favour and indulgence. Peace cannot be found in the indulgence of sin in the hope that God will not perceive or regard it, for we can sooner deceive ourselves than we can him; and while therefore, (ver. 19,) in reference to the past, we can only 'persuade' our hearts, or soothe their agitated feelings by evidence that we are of the truth now, and that our sins are forgiven; in reference to the present and the future, the heart can be kept calm only by such a course of life that our own hearts and our God shall approve the manner in which we live.

21. *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not.* If we so live as to have an ap-

22 And whatsoever <sup>a</sup> we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this <sup>b</sup> is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,

<sup>a</sup> Ps. 145. 18, 19; Pr. 15. 29; Mar. 11. 24.

<sup>b</sup> De. 18. 15-19; Jn. 14. 1.

proving conscience—that is, if we indulge in no secret sin; if we discharge faithfully every known duty; if we submit without murmuring to all the allotments of Divine Providence. ¶ Then have we confidence toward God. Comp. Notes, ver. 19; chap. i. 28; Acts xxiv. 16. The apostle evidently does not mean that we have confidence towards God on the ground of what we do, as if it were meritorious, or as if it constituted a claim to his favour; but that we may so live as to have evidence of personal piety, and that we may look forward with a confident hope that we shall be accepted of him in the great day. The word here rendered *confidence*—*παρρησία*—means properly *boldness*; usually boldness or openness in speaking our sentiments. See Notes, chap. ii. 28. The confidence or boldness which we have towards our Maker is founded solely on the evidence that he will graciously accept us as pardoned sinners; not in the belief that we deserve his favour.

22. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him. If we are truly his children, and ask in a proper manner. See Notes, Matt. vii. 7. Comp. Mark xi. 24; Luke xi. 9; xviii. 1, seq.; John xiv. 13; xv. 7; 1 John v. 14. The declaration here made must be understood with these limitations: (1,) that we ask in a proper manner, James iv. 3; and, (2,) that the thing asked shall be such as will be consistent for God to give; that is, such as he shall see to be best for us, 1 John v. 14. See Notes on this latter passage. ¶ Because we keep his commandments. Not that this is the meritorious ground of our being heard, but that it furnishes evidence that we are his children, and he hears his children as such. ¶ And do those things that are pleasing in his sight. As a parent is disposed to bestow favours on obedient,

and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he <sup>c</sup> that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby <sup>d</sup> we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

<sup>c</sup> Jn. 14. 23; 15. 16.

<sup>d</sup> Ro. 8. 9, 14.

affectionate, and dutiful children, so God is on those who please him by their obedience and submission to his will. We can have no hope that he will hear us unless we do so live as to please him.

23. And this is his commandment. His commandment, by way of eminence; the leading, principal thing which he enjoins on us; the commandment which lies at the foundation of all true obedience. ¶ That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. See Notes, Mark xvi. 16. Comp. John xvi. 1; Acts xvi. 31. ¶ And love one another, &c. This follows from the other, and hence they are mentioned as together constituting his commandment. Notes, John xiii. 35.

24. And he that keepeth his commandments, &c. See Notes, John xiv. 23. ¶ And hereby we know that he abideth in us. That is, this is another certain evidence that we are true Christians. The Saviour had promised (John xiv. 23) that he would come and take up his abode with his people. John says that we have proof that he does this by the Spirit which he has given us. That is, the Holy Spirit is imparted to his people to enlighten their minds; to elevate their affections; to sustain them in times of trial; to quicken them in the performance of duty; and to imbue them with the temper and spirit of the Lord Jesus. When these effects exist, we may be certain that the Spirit of God is with us; for these are the 'fruits' of that Spirit, or these are the effects which he produces in the lives of men. Comp. Notes, Gal. v. 22, 23. On the evidence of piety here referred to, see Notes on Rom. viii. 9, 14, 16. No man can be a true Christian in whom that Spirit does not constantly dwell, or to whom he is not 'given.' And yet no one can determine that the Spirit dwells in him, except by the effects produced

## CHAPTER IV.

**B**ELOVED, believe <sup>a</sup> not every spirit, but try <sup>b</sup> the spirits

<sup>a</sup> Je. 29.8; Mat. 24.4.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Th. 5.21; Ro. 8.2.

c 2 Pe. 2.8.

in his heart and life. In the following chapter, the apostle pursues the subject suggested here, and shows that we should examine ourselves closely, to see whether the 'Spirit' to which we trust, as furnishing evidence of piety, is truly the Spirit of God, or is a spirit of delusion.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

THERE are two principal subjects discussed in this chapter:—

I. The method by which we may determine that we have the Spirit of God, vers. 1—6. The apostle had said (chap. iii. 24) that it could be determined that God dwells in them by the Spirit which he has given them; but as it is probable that the teachers of error, the persons whom John regarded as 'antichrist,' (chap. ii. 18, 19,) would lay claim to the same thing, it was important to know how it could be ascertained that the Spirit of God had been really given to them, or how it could be determined that the spirit that was in them was not the spirit of antichrist, the very thing against which he would guard them. In doing this, he (1) cautions them against trusting to every kind of spirit, or supposing that every spirit which animated even the professed friends of religion was the Spirit of God, ver. 1; and (2) he shows them how it might be determined that they had really the Spirit of God, or what would be the effect of the influences of the Spirit on the mind. This evidence consisted of the following things: (a) they had the Spirit of God who confessed that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, ver. 2; (b) they who denied that, had not the Spirit of God, and the denial of this was the real spirit of antichrist, ver. 3; (c) they who had the Spirit of God had not the spirit of this world, vers. 4, 5; and (d) they who had the Spirit of God would hear those who were his apostles, or who were sent by him, ver. 6.

II. The duty, power, and influence of love, vers. 7—21. This is a favourite

whether they are of God: because <sup>c</sup> many false prophets are gone out into the world.

subject with John, and he here considers it at length, as a subject that was essential in determining the evidences of piety. The duty and value of love are enforced by the following considerations: (1.) Love has its origin in God, and every one who has true love is born of God, vers. 7, 8. (2.) God has shown his great love to us by having given his Son to die for us; and as he has so loved us, we ought also to love one another, vers. 9—11. (3.) If we love one another, it furnishes the best evidence that God dwells in us, vers. 12—15. (4.) God is love, and if we have true love we dwell in him, and he dwells in us, ver. 16. (5.) Love will furnish us great advantage in the day of judgment, by giving us confidence when we come before him, ver. 17. (6.) Love will cast out all fear, and will make our minds calm in view of the events which are to come, ver. 18. (7.) The very fact that he has first manifested his love to us should lead us to the exercise of love, ver. 19. (8.) A man cannot truly love God and yet hate his brother, ver. 20; and (9) it is the solemn command of God that he who loves God should love his brother also.

1. *Beloved, believe not every spirit.* Do not confide implicitly in every one who professes to be under the influences of the Holy Spirit. Comp. Matt. xxiv. 4, 5. The true and the false teachers of religion alike claimed to be under the influence of the Spirit of God, and it was of importance that all such pretensions should be examined. It was not to be admitted because any one claimed to have been sent from God that therefore he was sent. Every such claim should be subjected to the proper proof before it was conceded. All pretensions to divine inspiration, or to being authorised teachers of religion, were to be examined by the proper tests, because there were many false and delusive teachers who set up such claims in the world. ¶ *But try the spirits whether they are of God.* There were those in the early Christian church who had the

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every "spirit that confesseth

α 1 Co. 12. 3.

that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God :

gift of 'discerning spirits,' (see Notes, 1 Cor. xii. 10,) but it is not certain that the apostle refers here to any such supernatural power. It is more probable, as he addresses this command to Christians in general, that he refers to the ability of doing this by a comparison of the doctrines which they professed to hold with what was revealed, and by the fruits of their doctrines in their lives. If they taught what God had taught in his word, and if their lives corresponded with his requirements, and if their doctrines agreed with what had been inculcated by those who were admitted to be true apostles, (ver. 6,) they were to receive them as what they professed to be. If not, they were to reject them, and hold them to be impostors. It may be remarked, that it is just as proper and as important now to examine the claims of all who profess to be teachers of religion, as it was then. In a matter so momentous as religion, and where there is so much at stake, it is important that all pretensions of this kind should be subjected to a rigid examination. No man should be received as a religious teacher without the clearest evidence that he has come in accordance with the will of God, nor unless he inculcates the very truth which God has revealed. See Notes on Isa. viii. 20, and Acts xvii. 11. ¶ *Because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* The word *prophet* is often used in the New Testament to denote religious instructors or preachers. See Notes, Rom. xii. 6. Compare Notes, 2 Pet. ii. 1. Such false teachers evidently abounded in the times here referred to. See Notes, chap. ii. 18. The meaning is, that many had gone out into the world pretending to be true teachers of religion, but who inculcated most dangerous doctrines; and it was their duty to be on their guard against them, for they had the very spirit of antichrist, ver. 3.

2. *Hereby.* Gr., 'By this;' that is, by the test which is immediately specified. ¶ *Know ye the Spirit of God.* You may discern who are actuated by the Spirit of God. ¶ *Every spirit.*

Every one professing to be under the influence of the Spirit of God. The apostle uses the word *spirit* here with reference to the person who made the claim, on the supposition that every one professing to be a religious teacher was animated by some spirit or foreign influence, good or bad. If the Spirit of God influenced them, they would confess that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh; if some other spirit, the spirit of error and deceit, they would deny this. ¶ *That confesseth.* That is, that make a proper acknowledgment of this; that inculcates this doctrine, and that gives it a due place and prominence in his instructions. It cannot be supposed that a mere statement of this in words would show that they were of God in the sense that they were true Christians; but the sense is, that if this constituted one of the doctrines which they held and taught, it would show that they were advocates of truth, and not apostles of error. If they did not do this, (ver. 3,) it would be decisive in regard to their character and claims. ¶ *That Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.* Benson and some others propose to render this, 'That Jesus, who came in the flesh, is the Christ.' But this is liable to serious objections. (1.) It is not the obvious interpretation. (2.) It is unusual to say that 'Jesus had come in the flesh,' though the expression 'the Son of God has come in the flesh,' or 'God was manifested in the flesh,' would be in accordance with the usage of the New Testament. (3.) This would not, probably, meet the real point in the case. The thing denied does not appear to have been that Jesus was the Messiah, for their pretending to be Christian teachers at all implied that they admitted this; but that the Son of God was *really a man*, or that he actually assumed human nature in permanent union with the Divine. The point of the remark made by the apostle is, that the acknowledgment was to be that Christ assumed human nature; that he was really a man as he appeared to be: or that there was a real incar-



3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God : and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof

nation, in opposition to the opinion that he came in *appearance* only, or that he merely *seemed* to be a man, and to suffer and die. That this opinion was held by many, see the Intro. § III. 2. It is quite probable that the apostle here refers to such sentiments as those which were held by the *Docetæ*; and that he meant to teach that it was indispensable to proper evidence that any one came from God, that he should maintain that Jesus was truly *a man*, or that there was a real *incarnation* of the Son of God. John always regarded this as a very important point, and often refers to it, John xix. 34, 35; xx. 25—27; 1 John v. 6. It is as important to be held now as it was then, for the fact that there was a real incarnation is essential to all just views of the atonement. If he was *not* truly a man, if he did not literally shed his blood on the cross, of course all that was done was in appearance only, and the whole system of redemption as revealed was merely a splendid illusion. There is little danger that this opinion will be held now, for those who depart from the doctrine laid down in the New Testament in regard to the person and work of Christ, are more disposed to embrace the opinion that he was a mere man; but still it is important that the truth that he was truly incarnate should be held up constantly before the mind, for in no other way can we obtain just views of the atonement. ¶ *Is of God.* This does not necessarily mean that every one who confessed this was personally a true Christian, for it is clear that a doctrine might be acknowledged to be true, and yet that the heart might not be changed; nor does it mean that the acknowledgment of this truth was *all* which it was essential to be believed in order that one might be recognised as a Christian; but it means that it was *essential* that this truth should be admitted by every one who truly came from God. They who taught this held a truth which he had revealed, and which was essential to be held: and they thus showed that they

ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

4 Ye are of God, little children,

did not belong to those to whom the name 'antichrist' could be properly given. Still, whether they held this doctrine in such a sense, and in such connection with other doctrines, as to show that they were sincere Christians, was quite another question, for it is plain that a man may hold and teach the true doctrines of religion, and yet have no evidence that he is a child of God.

3. *And every spirit that confesseth not, &c.* That is, this doctrine is *essential* to the Christian system; and he who does not hold it cannot be regarded either as a Christian, or recognised as a Christian teacher. If he was not a man, then all that occurred in his life, in Gethsemane, and on the cross, was in *appearance* only, and was assumed only to delude the senses. There were no real sufferings; there was no shedding of blood; there was no death on the cross; and, of course, there was no atonement. A mere show, an appearance assumed, a vision, could not make atonement for sin; and a denial, therefore, of the doctrine that the Son of God had come in the flesh, was in fact a denial of the doctrine of expiation for sin. The Latin Vulgate here reads *qui solvit Jesum*, 'who dissolves or divides Jesus;'; and Socrates (H. E. vii. 32) says that in the old copies of the New Testament it is written *ὁ λύων τὸν Ἰησοῦν*, 'who dissolves or divides Jesus;'; that is, who *separates* his true nature or person, or whosupposes that there were *two* Christs, one in appearance, and one in reality. This reading was early found in some mss., and is referred to by many of the Fathers, (see Wetstein,) but it has no real authority, and was evidently introduced, perhaps at first from a marginal note, to oppose the prevailing errors of the times. The common reading, 'who confesseth not,' is found in all the Gr. mss., in the Syriac versions, in the Arabic; and, as Lücke says, the other reading is manifestly of Latin origin. The common reading in the text is that which is sustained by

and have overcome <sup>a</sup> them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

5 They are of the world: <sup>b</sup> therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

6 We are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby <sup>c</sup> know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

<sup>a</sup> Ro. 8.37.

<sup>b</sup> Jn. 3.31.

<sup>c</sup> 1a. 2.30.

authority, and is entirely in accordance with the manner of John. ¶ *And this is that spirit of antichrist.* This is one of the things which characterize antichrist. John here refers not to an individual who should be known as antichrist, but to a class of persons. This does not, however, forbid the idea that there might be some one individual, or a succession of persons in the church, to whom the name might be applied by way of eminence. See Notes, chap. ii. 18. Comp. Notes, 2 Thess. ii. 3, seq. ¶ *Whereof ye have heard that it should come.* See Notes, chap. ii. 18.

4. *Ye are of God.* You are of his family; you have embraced his truth, and imbibed his Spirit. ¶ *Little children.* Notes, chap. ii. 1. ¶ *And have overcome them.* Have triumphed over their arts and temptations; their endeavours to draw you into error and sin. The word 'them' in this place seems to refer to the false prophets or teachers who collectively constituted antichrist. The meaning is, that they had frustrated or thwarted all their attempts to turn them away from the truth. ¶ *Because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* God, who dwells in your hearts, and by whose strength and grace alone you have been enabled to achieve this victory, is more mighty than Satan, who rules in the hearts of the people of this world, and whose seductive arts are seen in the efforts of these false teachers. The apostle meant to say that it was by no power of their own that they achieved this victory, but it was to be traced solely to the fact that God dwelt among them, and had preserved them by his grace. What was true then is true now. He who dwells in the hearts of Christians by his Spirit, is infinitely more mighty than Satan, 'the ruler of the darkness of this world;' and victory, therefore, over all his arts and temptations may be sure. In his conflicts with

sin, temptation, and error, the Christian should never despair, for his God will insure him the victory.

5. *They are of the world.* This was one of the marks by which those who had the spirit of antichrist might be known. They belonged not to the church of God, but to the world. They had its spirit; they acted on its principles; they lived for it. Comp. Notes, chap. ii. 15. ¶ *Therefore speak they of the world.* Comp. Notes, chap. iii. 31. This may mean either that their conversation pertained to the things of this world, or that they were wholly influenced by the love of the world, and not by the Spirit of God, in the doctrines which they taught. The general sense is, that they had no higher ends and aims than they have who are influenced only by worldly plans and expectations. It is not difficult to distinguish, even among professed Christians and Christian teachers, those who are heavenly in their conversation from those who are influenced solely by the spirit of the world. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,' and the general turn of a man's conversation will show what 'spirit is within him.' ¶ *And the world heareth them.* The people of the world—the gay, the rich, the proud, the ambitious, the sensual—receive their instructions, and recognize them as teachers and guides, for their views accord with their own. See Notes, John xv. 19. A professedly religious teacher may always determine much about himself by knowing what class of people are pleased with him. A professed Christian of any station in life may determine much about his evidences of piety, by asking himself what kind of persons desire his friendship, and wish him for a companion.

6. *We are of God.* John here, doubtless, refers to himself, and to those who taught the same doctrines which he did. He takes it for granted that those to whom he wrote would admit this, and

7 Beloved, let us love <sup>a</sup> one another: for love is of God; and

<sup>a</sup> 1 Jn. 3.11, 23.

argues from it as an indisputable truth. He had given them such evidence of this, as to establish his character and claims beyond a doubt; and he often refers to the fact that he was what he claimed to be, as a point which was so well established that no one would call it in question. See John xix. 35; xxi. 24; 3 John 12. Paul, also, not unfrequently refers to the same thing respecting himself; to the fact—a fact which no one would presume to call in question, and which might be regarded as the basis of an argument—that he and his fellow-apostles were what they claimed to be. See 1 Cor. xv. 14, 15; 1 Thess. ii. 1—11. Might not, and ought not, all Christians, and all Christian ministers, so to live that the same thing might be assumed in regard to them in their intercourse with their fellow-men; that their characters for integrity and purity might be so clear that no one would be disposed to call them in question? There *are* such men in the church and in the ministry now; why might not all be such? ¶ *He that knoweth God, heareth us.* Every one that has a true acquaintance with the character of God will receive our doctrine. John might assume this, for it was not doubted, he presumed, that he was an apostle and a good man; and if this were admitted, it would follow that those who feared and loved God would receive what he taught. ¶ *Hereby.* By this; to wit, by the manner in which they receive the doctrines which we have taught. ¶ *Know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.* We can distinguish those who embrace the truth from those who do not. Whatever pretensions they might set up for piety, it was clear that if they did not embrace the doctrines taught by the true apostles of God, they could not be regarded as his friends; that is, as true Christians. It may be added that the same test is applicable now. They who do not receive the plain doctrines laid down in the word of God, whatever pretensions they may make to piety, or whatever zeal they may evince in the cause which they have espoused, can have no well-founded

every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God.

claims to the name Christian. One of the clearest evidences of true piety is a readiness to receive all that God has taught. Comp. Matt. xviii. 1-3; Mark x. 15; James i. 19-21.

7. *Beloved, let us love one another.* This verse introduces a new topic, the consideration of which occupies the remainder of the chapter. See the Analysis. The subject is one on which John dwells more than on any other—that of love. His own character peculiarly inclined him to the exercise of love; and the remarkable affection which the Lord Jesus had shown for him, seems to have had the effect to give this grace a peculiar prominence in his views of what constituted true religion. Compare John xiii. 23. On the duty here enjoined, see Notes on John xiii. 34, 35, and 1 John iii. 11, 23. ¶ *For love is of God.* (1.) All true love has its origin in God. (2.) Real love shows that we have his Spirit, and that we belong to him. (3.) It assimilates us to God, or makes us more and more like him. What is here said by the apostle is based on the truth of what he elsewhere affirms, (ver. 8, ) that God is love. Hatred, envy, wrath, malice, all have their source in something else than God. He neither originates them, commends them, nor approves them. ¶ *And every one that loveth, is born of God.* Is a regenerated man. That is, every one who has true love to Christians as such, or true brotherly love, is a true Christian. This cannot mean that every one that loves his wife and children, his classmate, his partner in business, or his friend—his house, or his farms, or his horses, or his hounds, is a child of God; it must be understood as referring to the point under discussion. A man may have a great deal of natural affection towards his kindred; a great deal of benevolence in his character towards the poor and needy, and still he may have none of the love to which John refers. He may have no real love to God, to the Saviour, or to the children of God as such; and it would be absurd for such a one to argue because he loves his wife and children

8 He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.<sup>a</sup>

9 In this <sup>b</sup> was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son

<sup>a</sup> ver. 16; <sup>b</sup> 2Co. 13. 11. <sup>c</sup> Jn. 3. 16. <sup>d</sup> Jn. 6. 51. <sup>e</sup> 1Jn. 2. 2.

that *therefore* he loves God, or is born again.

8. *He that loveth not, knoweth not God.* Has no true acquaintance with God; has no just views of him, and no right feelings towards him. The reason for this is implied in what is immediately stated, that 'God is love,' and of course if they have no love reigning in their hearts, they cannot pretend to be like him. ¶ *For God is love.* He is not merely benevolent, he is benevolence itself. Compare Notes, 2 Cor. xiii. 11. Never was a more important declaration made than this; never was more meaning crowded into a few words than in this short sentence—*God is love.* In the darkness of this world of sin—in all the sorrows that come now upon the race, and that will come upon the wicked hereafter—we have the assurance that a God of infinite benevolence rules over all; and though we may not be able to reconcile all that occurs with this declaration, or see how the things which he has permitted to take place are consistent with it, yet in the exercise of faith on his own declarations we may find consolation in *believing* that it is so, and may look forward to a period when all his universe shall *see* it to be so. In the midst of all that occurs on the earth of sadness, sin, and sorrow, there are abundant evidences that God is love. In the original structure of things before sin entered, when all was pronounced 'good;' in the things designed to promote happiness, where the only thing contemplated is happiness, and where it would have been as easy to have caused pain; in the preservation of a guilty race, and in granting that race the opportunity of another trial; in the ceaseless provision which God is making in his providence for the wants of unnumbered millions of his creatures; in the arrangements made to alleviate sorrow, and to put an end to it; in the gift of a Saviour more than all, and in the

into the world, that <sup>e</sup> we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation <sup>d</sup> for our sins.

offer of eternal life on terms simple and easy to be complied with—in all these things, which are the *mere* expressions of love, not *one* of which would have been found under the government of a malignant being, we see illustrations of the sublime and glorious sentiment before us, that 'God is love.' Even in this world of confusion, disorder, and darkness, we have evidence sufficient to prove that he is benevolent, but the full glory and meaning of that truth will be seen only in heaven. Meantime let us hold on to the truth that he is love. Let us believe that he sincerely desires our good, and that what seems dark to us may be designed for our welfare; and amidst all the sorrows and disappointments of the present life, let us feel that our interests and our destiny are in the hands of the God of love.

9. *In this was manifested the love of God.* That is, in an eminent manner, or this was a most signal proof of it. The apostle does not mean to say that it has been manifested in no other way, but that this was so prominent an instance of his love, that all the other manifestations of it seemed absorbed and lost in this. ¶ *Because that God sent his only begotten Son, &c.* See Notes on John iii. 16. ¶ *That we might live through him.* He died that we might have eternal life through the merits of his sacrifice. The *measure* of that love, then, which was manifested in the gift of a Saviour, is to be found, (1,) in the worth of the soul; (2,) in its exposure to eternal death; (3,) in the greatness of the gift; (4,) in the greatness of his sorrows for us; and, (5,) in the immortal blessedness and joy to which he will raise us. Who can estimate all this? All these things will magnify themselves as we draw near to eternity; and *in* that eternity to which we go, whether saved or lost, we shall have an ever-expanding view of the wonderful love of God.

11 Beloved, if <sup>a</sup> God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No <sup>b</sup> man hath seen God at

<sup>a</sup> Mat. 18. 33; Jn. 15. 19, 18.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Ti. 6. 16.

any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected <sup>c</sup> in us.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Co. 13. 13.

10. *Herein is love.* In this great gift is the highest expression of love, as if it had done all that it can do. ¶ *Not that we loved God.* Not that we were in such a state that we might suppose he would make such a sacrifice for us, but just the opposite. If we had loved and obeyed him, we might have had reason to believe that he would be willing to show his love to us in a corresponding manner. But we were alienated from him. We had even no desire for his friendship and favour. In *this* state he showed the greatness of his love for us by giving his Son to die for his enemies. See Notes on Rom. v. 7, 8. ¶ *But that he loved us.* Not that he approved our character, but that he desired our welfare. He loved us not with the love of complacency, but with the love of benevolence. ¶ *And sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* On the meaning of the word *propitiation*, see Notes on Rom. iii. 25. Comp. Notes, 1 John ii. 2.

11. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* (1.) Because he is so much exalted above us, and if he has loved those who were so inferior and so unworthy, we ought to love those who are on a level with us; (2.) because it is only in this way that we can show that we have his Spirit; and, (3.) because it is the nature of love to seek the happiness of all. There are much stronger reasons why we should love one another than there were why God should love us; and unless we do this, we can have no evidence that we are his children.

12. *No man hath seen God at any time.* See Notes, John i. 18, where the same declaration occurs. The statement seems to be made here in order to introduce a remark to show in what way we may know that we have any true knowledge of God. The idea is, 'He has never indeed been seen by mortal eyes. We are not, then, to expect to become acquainted with what he is in that way. But there is a method by which we may be assured that we have

a true knowledge of him, and that is, by evidence that we love another, and by the presence of his Spirit in our hearts. We cannot become acquainted with him by sight, but we may by love.' ¶ *If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.* Though we cannot see him, yet there is a way by which we may be assured that he is near us, and that he even dwells in us. That way is by the exercise of love. Comp. Notes, John xiv. 23, 24. ¶ *And his love is perfected in us.* Is carried out to completion. That is, our love for each other is the proper exponent of love to him reigning in our hearts. The idea here is not that we are absolutely perfect, or even that our love is perfect, whatever may be true on those points, but that this love to others is the proper carrying out of our love towards him; that is, without this our love to him would not have accomplished what it was adapted and designed to do. Unless it produced this effect, it would be defective or incomplete. Comp. ver. 17. The general sense is this: 'We claim to have the love of God in our hearts, or that we are influenced and controlled by love. But however high and exalted that may seem to be as exercised toward God, it would be defective; it would not exert a fair influence over us, unless it led us to love our Christian brethren. It would be like the love which we might profess to have for a father, if it did not lead us to love our brothers and sisters. True love will diffuse itself over all who come within its range, and will thus become complete and entire.' This passage, therefore, cannot be adduced to demonstrate the doctrine of sinless perfection, or to prove that Christians are ever absolutely perfect in this life. It proves only that love to God is not complete, or fully developed, unless it leads those who profess to have it to love each other. See Notes on Job i. 1. On the meaning of the Greek word here used, (*τελειώω*), see Notes on Phil. iii. 12. Comp. Notes, Heb. ii. 10.

13. *Hereby know we that we dwell in*

13 Hereby <sup>a</sup> know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever <sup>b</sup> shall confess that

<sup>a</sup> Jn.14.20; 1Jn.3.24.

him. Here is another, or an additional evidence of it. ¶ *Because he hath given us of his Spirit.* He has imparted the influences of that Spirit to our souls, producing 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,' &c., Gal. v. 22, 23. It was one of the promises which the Lord Jesus made to his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to be with them after he should be withdrawn from them, (John xiv. 16, 17, 26; xv. 26; xvi. 7,) and one of the clearest evidences which we can have that we are the children of God, is derived from the influences of that Spirit on our hearts. See this sentiment illustrated in the Notes on Rom. viii. 16.

14. *And we have seen.* Notes on chap. i. 1. ¶ *And do testify.* Notes on chap. i. 3. That is, we who are apostles bear witness to you of this great truth, that God has sent his Son to be a Saviour. Comp. Notes, John xx. 31. The reason why this is referred to here is not quite apparent, but the train of thought in this passage would seem to be this: The writer is discoursing of the love of God, and of its manifestation in the gift of the Saviour, and of the proper influence which it should have on us. Struck with the greatness and importance of the subject, his mind adverts to the evidence on which what he was saying rested—the evidence that the Father had *really* thus manifested his love. That evidence he repeats, that he had actually *seen* him who had been sent, and had the clearest demonstration that what he deemed so important had really occurred.

15. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God.* In the true sense, and from the heart. This will *always* prove that a man is a Christian. But the passage cannot mean that if he merely says so in words, or if he does it insincerely, or without any proper

Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God <sup>c</sup> is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

<sup>b</sup> Ro.10.9.

<sup>c</sup> ver.8.

sense of the truth, it will prove that he is a Christian. On the meaning of the sentiment here expressed, see Notes on ver. 2. Comp. Notes, Rom. x. 10.

16. *And we have known and believed,* &c. We all have assurance that God has loved us, and the fullest belief in the great fact of redemption by which he has manifested his love to us. ¶ *God is love.* Notes on ver. 8. It is not uncommon for John to repeat an important truth. He delights to dwell on such a truth as that which is here expressed; and who should not? What truth is there on which the mind can dwell with more pleasure; what is there that is better fitted to win the heart to holiness; what that will do more to sustain the soul in the sorrows and trials of this life? In our trials; in the darkness which is around us; in the perplexities which meet and embarrass us in regard to the Divine administration; in all that seems to us incomprehensible in this world, and in the prospect of the next, let us learn to repeat this declaration of the favoured disciple, '*God is love.*' What trials may we not bear, if we feel assured of that! What dark cloud that seems to hang over our way, and to involve all things in gloom, will not be bright, if from the depths of our souls we can always say, '*God is love!*' ¶ *And he that dwelleth in love,* &c. Religion is all love. God is love; he has loved us; we are to love him; we are to love one another; we are to love the whole world. Heaven is filled with love, and there is nothing else there. The earth is filled with love just as far as religion prevails, and would be entirely if it should prevail everywhere. Love would remove all the corrupt passions, the crimes, the jealousies, the wars on the earth, and would diffuse around the globe the bliss of heaven. If a man, therefore, is actuated by this, he has

17 Herein is <sup>1</sup> our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but

<sup>1</sup> love with us.

the spirit of the heavenly world reigning in his soul, and lives in an atmosphere of love.

17. *Herein is our love made perfect.* Marg., *love with us.* The margin accords with the Greek—*μὴ ἡμῶν*. The meaning is, 'the love that is within us, or in us, is made perfect.' The expression is unusual; but the general idea is, that love is rendered complete or entire in the manner in which the apostle specifies. In this way love becomes what it should be, and will prepare us to appear with confidence before the judgment-seat. Comp. Notes on ver. 12. ¶ *That we may have boldness in the day of judgment.* By the influence of love in delivering us from the fear of the wrath to come, ver. 18. The idea is, that he who has true love to God will have nothing to fear in the day of judgment, and may even approach the awful tribunal where he is to receive the sentence which shall determine his everlasting destiny without alarm. ¶ *Because as he is, so are we in this world.* That is, we have the same traits of character which the Saviour had, and, resembling him, we need not be alarmed at the prospect of meeting him.

18. *There is no fear in love.* Love is not an affection which produces fear. In the love which we have for a parent, a child, a friend, there is no fear. If a man had perfect love to God, he would have no fear of anything—for what would he have to dread? He would have no fear of death, for he would have nothing to dread beyond the grave. It is guilt that makes men fear what is to come; but he whose sins are pardoned, and whose heart is filled with the love of God, has nothing to dread in this world or the world to come. The angels in heaven, who have always loved God and one another, have no fear, for they have nothing to dread in the future; the redeemed in heaven, rescued from all danger, and filled with the love of God, have nothing to dread; and as far as

perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth, is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he <sup>a</sup> first loved us.

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 15. 16.

that same loves operates on earth, it delivers the soul now from all apprehension of what is to come. ¶ *But perfect love casteth out fear.* That is, love that is complete, or that is allowed to exert its proper influence on the soul. As far as it exists, its tendency is to deliver the mind from alarms. If it should exist in any soul in an absolutely perfect state, that soul would be entirely free from all dread in regard to the future. ¶ *Because fear hath torment.* It is a painful and distressing emotion. Thus men suffer from the fear of poverty, of losses, of bereavement, of sickness, of death, and of future woe. From all these distressing apprehensions, that love of God which furnishes an evidence of true piety delivers us. ¶ *He that feareth, is not made perfect in love.* He about whose mind there lingers the apprehension of future wrath, shows that love in his soul has not accomplished its full work. Perhaps it never will on any soul until we reach the heavenly world, though there are many minds so full of love to God, as to be prevailingly delivered from fear.

19. *We love him, because he first loved us.* This passage is susceptible of two explanations; either (1) that the fact that he first loved us is the ground or reason why we love him, or (2) that as a matter of fact we have been brought to love him in consequence of the love which he has manifested towards us, though the real ground of our love may be the excellency of his own character. If the former be the meaning, and if that were the *only* ground of love, then it would be mere selfishness, (comp. Matt. v. 46, 47;) and it cannot be believed that John meant to teach that that is the *only* reason of our love to God. It is true, indeed, that that is a proper ground of love, or that we are bound to love God in proportion to the benefits which we have received from his hand; but still genuine love to God is something which cannot be explained by

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how <sup>a</sup> can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That <sup>b</sup> he who loveth God love his brother also.

the mere fact that we have received favours from him. The true, the original ground of love to God, is the *excellence of his own character*, apart from the question whether we are to be benefited or not. There is that in the Divine nature which a holy being will love, apart from the benefits which he is to receive, and from any thought even of his own destiny. It seems to me, therefore, that John must have meant here, in accordance with the second interpretation suggested above, that *the fact* that we love God is to be traced to the means which he has used to bring us to himself, but without saying that this is the sole or even the main *reason* why we love him. It was his love manifested to us by sending his Son to redeem us which will explain *the fact* that we now love him; but still the real ground or reason why we love him is the infinite excellence of his own character. It should be added here, that many suppose that the Greek words rendered 'we love' (*ἡμῖς ἀγαπῶμεν*) are not in the indicative, but in the subjunctive; and that this is an exhortation—'let us love him, because he first loved us.' So the Syriac, the Arabic, and the Vulgate read it; and so it is understood by Benson, Grotius, and Bloomfield. The main idea would not be essentially different; and it is a proper ground of exhortation to love God because he has loved us, though the highest ground is, because his character is infinitely worthy of love.

20. *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother.* His Christian brother; or, in a larger sense, any man. The sense is, that no man, whatever may be his professions and pretensions, can have any true love to God, unless he love his brethren. ¶ *He is a liar.* Comp. Notes, chap. i. 6. It is not necessary, in order to a proper interpretation of this passage, to suppose that

## CHAPTER V.

WHOSOEVER <sup>c</sup> believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.

a 1Jn.3.17.

b 1Jn.13.34.

c 1Jn.1.12,13.

he *intentionally* deceives. The sense is, that this must be a false profession. ¶ *For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, &c.* It is more reasonable to expect that we should love one whom we have seen and known personally, than that we should love one whom we have not seen. The apostle is arguing from human nature as it is, and every one feels that we are more likely to love one with whom we are familiar than one who is a stranger. If a professed Christian, therefore, does not love one who bears the Divine image, whom he sees and knows, how can he love that God whose image he bears, whom he has not seen? Comp. Notes on chap. iii. 17.

21. *And this commandment have we from him.* That is, the command to love a brother is as obligatory as that to love God. If one is obeyed, the other ought to be also; if a man feels that one is binding on him, he should feel that the other is also; and he can never have evidence that he is a true Christian, unless he manifests love to his brethren as well as love to God. See Notes on James ii. 10. ¶ *That he who loveth God love his brother also.* See Notes, John xiii. 34, 35. Comp. John xv. 12, 17.

## CHAPTER V.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

This chapter embraces the following subjects: I. A continuance of the discussion about *love*, vers. 1—3. These verses should have been attached to the previous chapter. II. The victory which is achieved over the world by those who are born of God. The grand instrumentality by which this is done, is by the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, vers. 4, 5. III. The evidence that Jesus is the Son of God; or the means by which that truth is so believed as to secure a victory over the world, vers. 6—12. In this part of the chapter the apostle goes



2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we

love God, and keep his commandments.

fully into the nature of this evidence, or the ways in which the Christian becomes so thoroughly convinced of it as to give to faith this power. He refers to these sources of evidence : (a) The witness of the Spirit, ver. 6. (b) The record borne in heaven, ver. 7—if that verse be genuine. (c) The evidence borne on earth, by the Spirit, the water, and the blood—all bearing witness to that one truth. (d) The credit which is due to the testimony of God, or which the soul pays to it, ver. 8. (e) The fact that he who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself, ver. 10. (f) The amount of the record, that God has given to us eternal life through his Son, vers. 11, 12. IV. The reason why all this was written by the apostle, ver. 13. It was that they might know that they had eternal life, and might believe on the name of the Saviour. V. The effect of this in leading us to the throne of grace, with the assurance that God will hear us, and will grant our requests, vers. 14, 15. VI. The power of prayer, and the duty of praying for those who have sinned. The encouragement to this is, that there are many sins which are not unto death, and that we may hope that God will be merciful to those who have not committed the unpardonable offence, vers. 16, 17. VII. A summary of all that the apostle had said to them, or of the points of which they were sure in the matter of salvation, vers. 18–20. They knew that those who are born of God do not sin; that the wicked one cannot permanently injure them; that they were of God, while all the world lay in wickedness; that the Son of God had come, and that they were truly united to that Saviour who is the true God, and who is eternal life. VIII. An exhortation to keep themselves from all idolatry, ver. 21.

1. *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ.* Is the Messiah; the anointed of God. On the meaning of the word *Christ*, see Notes on Matt. i. 1. Of course it is meant here that the proposition, that 'Jesus is the Christ,' should be believed or received in the true and proper sense, in order to fur-

nish evidence that any one is born of God. Comp. Notes on chap. iv. 3. It cannot be supposed that a mere intellectual acknowledgment of the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah is all that is meant, for that is not the proper meaning of the word *believe* in the Scriptures. That word, in its just sense, implies that the truth which is believed should make its fair and legitimate impression on the mind, or that we should feel and act *as if* it were true. See Notes, Mark xvi. 16. If, in the proper sense of the phrase, a man does believe that Jesus is the Christ, receiving him as he is revealed as the Anointed of God, and a Saviour, it is undoubtedly true that that constitutes him a Christian, for that is what is required of a man in order that he may be saved. See Notes, Acts viii. 37. ¶ *Is born of God.* Or rather, 'is begotten of God.' See Notes, John iii. 3. ¶ *And every one that loveth him that begat.* That loves that God who has thus begotten those whom he has received as his children, and to whom he sustains the endearing relation of Father. ¶ *Loveth him also that is begotten of him.* That is, he will love all the true children of God; all Christians. See Notes on chap. iv. 20. The general idea is, that as all Christians are the children of the same Father; as they constitute one family; as they all bear the same image; as they share his favour alike; as they are under the same obligation of gratitude to him, and are bound to promote the same common cause, and are to dwell together in the same home for ever, they should therefore love one another. As all the children in a family love their common father, so it should be in the great family of which God is the Head.

2. *By this we know that we love the children of God, &c.* This is repeating the same truth in another form. 'As it is universally true that if we love him who has begotten us, we shall also love his children, or our Christian brethren, so it is true also that if we love his children it will follow that we love him.' In other places, the apostle

3 For this is the love of God, that <sup>a</sup>we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not <sup>b</sup>grievous.

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 14. 15, 21.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. 119. 45; Mat. 11. 30.

says that we may know that we love God if we love those who bear his image, chap. iii. 14. He here says, that there is another way of determining what we are. We may have undoubted evidence that we love *God*, and from that, as the basis of an argument, we may infer that we have true love to his children. Of the fact that we may have evidence that we love God, apart from that which we derive from our love to his children, there can be no doubt. We may be conscious of it; we may find pleasure in meditating on his perfections; we may feel sure that we are moved to obey him by true attachment to him, as a child may in reference to a father. But, it may be asked, how can it be inferred from this that we truly love his children? Is it not more easy to ascertain this of itself than it is to determine whether we love God? Comp. chap. iv. 20. To this it may be answered, that we may love Christians from many motives: we may love them as personal friends; we may love them because they belong to our church, or sect, or party; we may love them because they are naturally amiable: but the apostle says here, that when we are conscious that an attachment *does* exist towards Christians, we may ascertain that it is genuine, or that it does not proceed from any improper motive, by the fact that we love God. We shall then love him *as* his children, whatever *other* grounds of affection there may be towards them. ¶ *And keep his commandments.* See Notes, John xiv. 15.

3. *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.* This constitutes true love; this furnishes the evidence of it. ¶ *And his commandments are not grievous.* Greek, *heavy*—*βαρύναι*; that is, difficult to be borne as a burden. See Matt. xi. 30. The meaning is, that his laws are not unreasonable; the duties which he requires are not beyond our ability; his government is not oppressive. It is

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh <sup>a</sup>the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

<sup>a</sup> 1Co. 15. 57.

easy to obey God when the heart is right; and those who endeavour in sincerity to keep his commandments do not complain that they are hard. All complaints of this kind come from those who are not disposed to keep his commandments. *They*, indeed, object that his laws are unreasonable; that they impose improper restraints; that they are not easily complied with; and that the Divine government is one of severity and injustice. But no such complaints come from true Christians. They find *his* service easier than the service of sin, and the laws of God more mild and easy to be complied with than were those of fashion and honour, which they once endeavoured to obey. The service of God is freedom; the service of the world is bondage. No man ever yet heard a true Christian say that the laws of God, requiring him to lead a holy life, were stern and 'grievous.' But who has not felt this in regard to the inexorable laws of sin? What votary of the world would not say this if he spoke his real sentiments? Comp. Notes, John viii. 32.

4. *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.* The world, in its maxims, and precepts, and customs, does not rule him, but he is a freeman. The idea is, that there is a conflict between religion and the world, and that in the heart of every true Christian religion secures the victory, or triumphs. In John xvi. 33, the Saviour says, 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' See Notes on that verse. He obtained a complete triumph over him 'who rules the darkness of the world,' and laid the foundation for a victory by his people over all vice, error, and sin. John makes this affirmation of *all* who are born of God. '*Whatsoever*,' or, as the Greek is, 'Everything which is begotten of God,' (*πᾶς ὁ γεννημένος*;) meaning to affirm, undoubtedly, that *in every instance* where one is truly regenerated, there is this victory over the world. See Notes, James iv. 4; 1 John

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?

6 This is he that came <sup>a</sup> by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ ; not

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 18. 34.

ii. 15, 16. It is one of the settled maxims of religion, that every man who is a true Christian gains a victory over the world ; and consequently a maxim *as* settled, that where the spirit of the world reigns supremely in the heart, there is no true religion. But, if this be a true principle, how many professed Christians are there who are strangers to all claims of piety—for how many are there who are wholly governed by the spirit of this world ! ¶ *And this is the victory.* This is the source or means of the victory which is thus achieved. ¶ *Even our faith.* Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, ver. 5. He overcame the world, (John xvi. 33,) and it is by that faith which makes us one with him, and that imbues us with his Spirit, that we are able to do it also.

5. *Who is he, &c.* Where is there one who can pretend to have obtained a victory over the world, except he who believes in the Saviour ? All else are worldly, and are governed by worldly aims and principles. It is true that a man may gain a victory over *one* worldly passion ; he may subdue some one evil propensity ; he may abandon the gay circle, may break away from habits of profaneness, may leave the company of the unprincipled and polluted ; but still, unless he has faith in the Son of God, the spirit of the world will reign supreme in his soul in some form. The appeal which John so confidently made in his time may be as confidently made now. *We* may ask, as *he* did, where is there one who shows that he has obtained a complete victory over the world, except the true Christian ? Where is there one whose end and aim is not the present life ? Where is there one who shows that all his purposes in regard to this world are made subordinate to the world to come ? There are those now, as there were then, who break away from one form of sin, and from one circle of sinful companions ; there are those who change the ardent passions of youth for the soberness of middle or advanced life ;

there are those who see the folly of profaneness, and of gaiety, and intemperance ; there are those who are disappointed in some scheme of ambition, and who withdraw from political conflicts ; there are those who are satiated with pageantry, and who, oppressed with the cares of state, as Diocletian and Charles V. were, retire from public life ; and there are those whose hearts are crushed and broken by losses, and by the death, or what is worse than death, by the ingratitude of their children, and who cease to cherish the fond hope that their family will be honoured, and their name perpetuated in those whom they tenderly loved—but still there is no victory over the world. Their deep dejection, their sadness, their brokenness of spirit, their lamentations, and their want of cheerfulness, all show that the spirit of the world still reigns in their hearts. If the calamities which have come upon them could be withdrawn ; if the days of prosperity could be restored, they would show as much of the spirit of the world as ever they did, and would pursue its follies and its vanities as greedily as they had done before. Not many years or months elapse before the worldly mother who has followed one daughter to the grave, will introduce another into the gay world with all the brilliancy which fashion prescribes ; not long will a worldly father mourn over the death of a son before, in the whirl of business and the exciting scenes of ambition, he will show that his heart is as much wedded to the world as it ever was. If such sorrows and disappointments conduct to the Saviour, as they sometimes do ; if they lead the troubled mind to seek peace in his blood, and support in the hope of heaven, then a real victory is obtained over the world ; and then, when the hand of affliction is withdrawn, it is seen that there has been a work of grace in the soul that has effectually changed all its feelings, and secured a triumph that shall be eternal.

6. *This is he.* This Son of God re-

by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit <sup>a</sup> that

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 14. 17.

bearth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

ferred to in the previous verse. The object of the apostle in this verse, in connection with verse 8, is to state the nature of the evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. He refers to three well-known things on which he probably had insisted much in his preaching—the water, and the blood, and the Spirit. These, he says, furnished evidence on the very point which he was illustrating, by showing that that Jesus on whom they believed was the Son of God. ‘This,’ says he, ‘is the same one, the very person, to whom the well-known and important testimony is borne; to him, and him alone, these undisputed things appertain, and not to any other who should claim to be the Messiah; and they all agree on the same one point,’ ver. 8. ¶ *That came.* ἡ ἰσθὺς. This does not mean that when he came into the world he was accompanied in some way by water and blood; but the idea is, that the water and the blood were clearly manifest during his appearing on earth, or that they were remarkable testimonials in some way to his character and work. An ambassador might be said to *come* with credentials; a warrior might be said to *come* with the spoils of victory; a prince might be said to *come* with the insignia of royalty; a prophet *comes* with signs and wonders; and the Lord Jesus might also be said to have come with power to raise the dead, and to heal disease, and to cast out devils; but John here fixes the attention on a fact so impressive and remarkable in his view as to be worthy of special remark, that he *came* by water and blood. ¶ *By water.* There have been many opinions in regard to the meaning of this phrase. See Pool’s Synopsis. Compare also Lücke, *in loc.* A mere reference to some of these opinions may aid in ascertaining the true interpretation. (1.) Clement of Alexandria supposes that by *water* regeneration and faith were denoted, and by *blood* the public acknowledgment of that. (2.) Some, and among them Wetstein, have held that the words are used to denote the fact

that the Lord Jesus was truly a man, in contradistinction from the doctrine of the *Docetæ*; and that the apostle means to say that he had all the properties of a human being—a spirit or soul, blood, and the watery humours of the body. (3.) Grotius supposes that by his coming ‘by water,’ there is reference to his pure life, as water is the emblem of purity; and he refers to Ezek. xxxvi. 25; Isa. i. 16; Jer. iv. 14. As a sign of that purity, he says that John baptized him, John i. 28. A sufficient objection to this view is, that as in the corresponding word *blood* there is undoubted reference to blood literally, it cannot be supposed that the word *water* in the same connection would be used figuratively. Moreover, as Lücke (p. 287) has remarked, water, though a *symbol* of purity, is never used to denote *purity itself*, and therefore cannot here refer to the pure life of Jesus. (4.) Many expositors suppose that the reference is to the baptism of Jesus, and that by his ‘coming by water and blood,’ as by the latter there is undoubted reference to his death, so by the former there is reference to his baptism, or to his entrance on his public work. Of this opinion were Tertullian, Ecumenius, Theophylact, among the fathers, and Capellus, Heumann, Stroth, Lange, Ziegler, A. Clarke, Bengel, Rosenmüller, Macknight, and others, among the moderns. A leading argument for this opinion, as alleged, has been that it was then that the Spirit bare witness to him, (Matt. iii. 16,) and that this is what John here refers to when he says, ‘It is the Spirit that beareth witness,’ &c. To this view, Lücke urges substantially the following objections: (a) That if it refers to baptism, the phrase would much more appropriately express the fact that Jesus came baptizing others, if that were so, than that he was baptized himself. The phrase would be strictly applicable to John the Baptist, who came baptizing, and whose ministry was distinguished for that, (Matt. iii. 1;) and if Jesus had baptized in the same manner, or if this

had been a prominent characteristic of his ministry, it would be applicable to him. Comp. John iv. 2. But if it means that he was *baptized*, and that he came in that way 'by water,' it was equally true of all the apostles who were baptized, and of all others, and there was nothing so remarkable in the fact that he was baptized as to justify the prominence given to the phrase in this place. (b) If reference be had here, as is supposed in this view of the passage, to the 'witness' that was borne to the Lord Jesus on the occasion of his baptism, then the reference should have been not to the 'water' as the witness, but to the 'voice that came from heaven,' (Matt. iii. 17,) for it was that which was the witness in the case. Though this occurred at the *time* of the baptism, yet it was quite an independent thing, and was important enough to have been referred to. See Lücke, *Com. in loc.* These objections, however, are not insuperable. Though Jesus did not come baptizing others himself, (John iv. 2,) and though the phrase would have expressed that if he had, yet, as Christian baptism began with him; as this was the first act in his entrance on public life; as it was by this that he was set apart to his work; and as he designed that this should be always the initiatory rite of his religion, there was no impropriety in saying that his 'coming,' or his advent in this world, was at the beginning characterized by water, and at the close by blood. Moreover, though the 'witness' at his baptism was really borne by a voice from heaven, yet his baptism was the prominent thing; and if we take the baptism to denote *all* that in fact occurred when he was baptized, all the objections made by Lücke here vanish. (5.) Some, by the 'water' here, have understood the ordinance of baptism as it is appointed by the Saviour to be administered to his people, meaning that the ordinance was instituted by him. So Beza, Calvin, Piscator, Calovius, Wolf, Beausobre, Knapp, Lücke, and others understand it. According to this the meaning would be, that he appointed baptism by water as a symbol of the cleansing of the heart, and shed his blood to effect the ransom of man, and that thus it might be said that he 'came

by water and blood;' to wit, by these two things as effecting the salvation of men. But it seems improbable that the apostle should have grouped these things together in this way. For (a) the 'blood' is that which he shed; which pertained to him personally; which he poured out for the redemption of man; and it is clear that, whatever is meant by the phrase '*he came*,' his coming by 'water' is to be understood in some sense similar to his coming by 'blood;' and it seems incredible that the apostle should have joined a mere *ordinance* of religion in this way with the shedding of his blood, and placed them in this manner on an equality. (b) It cannot be supposed that John meant to attach so much importance to baptism as would be implied by this. The shedding of his blood was essential to the redemption of men; can it be supposed that the apostle meant to teach that baptism by water is equally necessary? (c) If this be understood of baptism, there is no natural connection between that and the 'blood' referred to; nothing by which the one would suggest the other; no reason why they should be united. If he had said that he 'came' by the appointment of two ordinances for the edification of the church, 'baptism and the supper,' however singular such a statement might be in some respects, yet there would be a connection, a reason why they should be suggested together. But why should baptism and the blood shed by the Saviour on the cross be grouped together as designating the principal things which characterized his coming into the world? (6.) There remains, then, but one other interpretation; to wit, that he refers to the 'water and the blood' which flowed from the side of the Saviour when he was pierced by the spear of the Roman soldier. John had himself laid great stress on this occurrence, and on the fact that he had himself witnessed it, (see Notes on John xix. 34, 35;) and as, in these epistles, he is accustomed to allude to more full statements made in his Gospel, it would seem most natural to refer the phrase to that event as furnishing a clear and undoubted proof of the death of the Saviour. This would be the obvious interpretation, and would be

7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, <sup>a</sup> the

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 8.18.

Word, <sup>b</sup> and the Holy Ghost : <sup>c</sup> and these three are one.

<sup>b</sup> He. 4.12, 13; Re. 19.13.

<sup>c</sup> Jn. 10.30.

entirely clear, if John did not immediately speak of the 'water' and the 'blood' as *separate* witnesses, each as bearing witness to an important point, as separate as the 'Spirit' and the 'water,' or the 'Spirit' and the 'blood;' whereas, if he refers to the mingled water and blood flowing from his side, they both witness only the same fact, to wit, his death. There was no *special* significance in the water, no distinct testifying to anything different from the flowing of the blood; but together they bore witness to the *one* fact that he actually died. But here he seems to suppose that there is some special significance in each. 'Not by water *only*, but by water and blood.' 'There are *three* that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one.' These considerations seem to me to make it probable, on the whole, that the fourth opinion, above referred to, and that which has been commonly held in the Christian church, is correct, and that by the 'water' the *baptism* of the Saviour is intended; his baptism as an emblem of his own purity; as significant of the nature of his religion; as a rite which was to be observed in his church at all times. That furnished an important attestation to the fact that he was the Messiah, (comp. Notes on Matt. iii. 15,) for it was by that that he entered on his public work, and it was then that a remarkable testimony was borne to his being the Son of God. He himself '*came*,' thus by water as an emblem of purity; and the water used in his church in all ages in baptism, together with the 'blood' and the 'Spirit,' bears public testimony to the pure nature of his religion. It is *possible* that the mention of the 'water' in his baptism suggested to John also the water which flowed from the side of the Saviour at his death, intermingled with blood; and that though the primary thought in his mind was the fact that Jesus was baptized, and that an important attestation was then given to his Messiahship, yet he *may* have instantly adverted to the fact that *water* per-

formed so important a part, and was so important a symbol through all his work; water at his introduction to his work, as an ordinance in his church, as symbolical of the nature of his religion, and even at his death, as a public attestation, in connection with flowing blood, to the fact that he truly *died*, in reality, and not, as the *Docetæ* pretended, in appearance only, thus completing the work of the Messiah, and making an atonement for the sins of the world. Comp. Notes, John xix. 34, 35. ¶ *And blood*. Referring, doubtless, to the shedding of his blood on the cross. He '*came*' by that; that is, he was manifested by that to men, or that was one of the forms in which he appeared to men, or by which his coming into the world was characterized. The apostle means to say that the blood shed at his death furnished an important evidence or 'witness' of what he was. In what way this was done, see Notes on ver. 8. ¶ *Not by water only, but by water and blood*. John the Baptist came 'by water only;' that is, he came to baptize the people, and to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was distinguished from him in the fact that his ministry was characterized by the shedding of blood, or the shedding of his blood constituted one of the peculiarities of his work. ¶ *And it is the Spirit*. Evidently the Holy Spirit. ¶ *That beareth witness*. That is, he is the *great* witness in the matter, confirming all others. He bears witness to the soul that Jesus came 'by water and blood,' for that would not be received by us without his agency. In what way he does this, see Notes on ver. 8. ¶ *Because the Spirit is truth*. Is so eminently *true* that he may be called *truth itself*, as God is so eminently benevolent that he may be called *love itself*. See Notes on chap. iv. 8.

7. *For there are three that bear record in heaven, &c.* There are three that *witness*, or that *bear witness*—the same Greek word which, in ver. 8, is rendered *bear witness*—μαρτυροῦντες. There is no passage of the New Testa-

ment which has given rise to so much discussion in regard to its genuineness as this. The supposed importance of the verse in its bearing on the doctrine of the Trinity has contributed to this, and has given to the discussion a degree of consequence which has pertained to the examination of the genuineness of no other passage of the New Testament. On the one hand, the clear testimony which it seems to bear to the doctrine of the Trinity, has made that portion of the Christian church which holds the doctrine reluctant in the highest degree to abandon it; and on the other hand, the same clearness of the testimony to that doctrine, has made those who deny it not less reluctant to admit the genuineness of the passage. It is not consistent with the design of these Notes to go into a full investigation of a question of this sort. And all that can be done is to state, in a brief way, the *results* which have been reached, in an examination of the question. Those who are disposed to pursue the investigation further, can find all that is to be said in the works referred to at the bottom of the page.\* The portion of the passage, in vers. 7, 8, whose genuineness is disputed, is included in brackets in the following quotation, as it stands in the common editions of the New Testament: 'For there are three that bear record [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth,] the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one.' If the disputed passage, therefore, be omitted as spurious, the whole passage will read, 'For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one.' The reasons which seem to me to prove that the passage included in brackets is spurious, and should not be regarded as a part of the inspired

writings, are briefly the following: I. It is wanting in all the earlier Greek manuscripts, for it is found in *no* Greek ms. written before the sixteenth century. Indeed, it is found in only two Greek manuscripts of any age—one the Codex Montfortianus, or Britannicus, written in the beginning of the sixteenth century, and the other the Codex Ravianus, which is a mere transcript of the text, taken partly from the third edition of Stephen's New Testament, and partly from the Complutensian Polyglott. But it is incredible that a genuine passage of the New Testament should be wanting in *all* the early Greek manuscripts. II. It is wanting in the earliest versions, and, indeed, in a large part of the versions of the New Testament which have been made in all former times. It is wanting in both the Syriac versions—one of which was made probably in the first century; in the Coptic, Armenian, Slavonic, Ethiopic, and Arabic. III. It is never quoted by the Greek fathers in their controversies on the doctrine of the Trinity—a passage which would be so much in point, and which could not have failed to be quoted if it were genuine; and it is not referred to by the Latin fathers until the time of Vigilius, at the end of the fifth century. If the passage were believed to be genuine—nay, if it were known at all to be in existence, and to have any probability in its favour—it is incredible that in all the controversies which occurred in regard to the Divine nature, and in all the efforts to define the doctrine of the Trinity, this passage should never have been referred to. But it never was; for it must be plain to any one who examines the subject with an unbiassed mind, that the passages which are relied on to prove that it was quoted by Athanasius, Cyprian, Augustin, &c., (Wetstein, II., p. 725,) are not taken from this place, and are not such as they would have made if they had been acquainted with this passage, and had designed to quote it. IV. The argument against the passage from the external proof is confirmed by internal evidence, which makes it morally certain that it cannot be genuine. (a) The connection does not demand it. It does not contribute to advance what the

\* Mill. New Test., pp. 379-386; Wetstein, II. 721-727; Father Simon, Crit. Hist. New Test.; Michaelis, Intro. New Test., iv. 412 seq.; Semler, Histor. und Krit. Sammlungen über die sogenannten Beweistellen der Dogmatik. Erstes Stück über, 1 John v. 7; Griesbach, Diatribe in locum, 1 John v. 7, 8, second edit., New Test., vol. II., appendix 1; and Lucke's Commentary in loc.

apostle is saying, but breaks the thread of his argument entirely. He is speaking of certain things which bear 'witness' to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah; certain things which were well known to those to whom he was writing—the Spirit, and the water, and the blood. How does it contribute to strengthen the force of this to say that in heaven there are 'three that bear witness'—three not before referred to, and having no connection with the matter under consideration? (b) The language is not such as John would use. He does, indeed, elsewhere use the term *Logos*, or *Word*—*ὁ Λόγος*, (John i. 1, 14; 1 John i. 1), but it is never in this form, 'The Father, and the Word;' that is, the terms 'Father' and 'Word' are never used by him, or by any of the other sacred writers, as correlative. The word *Son*—*ὁ Υἱός*—is the term which is correlative to the *Father* in every other place as used by John, as well as by the other sacred writers. See 1 John i. 3; ii. 22—24; iv. 14; 2 John iii. 9; and the Gospel of John, *passim*. Besides, the correlative of the term *Logos*, or *Word*, with John, is not *Father*, but *God*. See John i. 1. Comp. Rev. xix. 13. (c) Without this passage, the sense of the argument is clear and appropriate. There are three, says John, which bear witness that Jesus is the Messiah. These are referred to in ver. 6; and in immediate connection with this, in the argument, (ver. 8,) it is affirmed that their testimony goes to one point, and is harmonious. To say that there are other witnesses elsewhere, to say that they are one, contributes nothing to illustrate the nature of the testimony of these three—the water, and the blood, and the Spirit; and the internal sense of the passage, therefore, furnishes as little evidence of its genuineness as the external proof. V. It is easy to imagine how the passage found a place in the New Testament. It was at first written, perhaps, in the margin of some Latin manuscript, as expressing the belief of the writer of what was true in heaven, as well as on earth, and with no more intention to deceive than we have when we make a marginal note in a book. Some transcriber copied it into the body of the text, perhaps with

a sincere belief that it was a genuine passage, omitted by accident; and then it became too important a passage in the argument for the Trinity, ever to be displaced but by the most clear critical evidence. It was rendered into Greek, and inserted in one Greek manuscript of the 16th century, while it was wanting in all the earlier manuscripts. VI. The passage is now omitted in the best editions of the Greek Testament, and regarded as spurious by the ablest critics. See Griesbach and Hahn. On the whole, therefore, the evidence seems to me to be clear that this passage is not a genuine portion of the inspired writings, and should not be appealed to in proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. One or two remarks may be made, in addition, in regard to its use. (1.) Even on the supposition that it is genuine, as Bengel believed it was, and as he believed that some Greek manuscript *would* yet be found which would contain it,\* yet it is not wise to adduce it as a proof-text. It would be much easier to prove the doctrine of the Trinity from other texts, than to demonstrate the genuineness of this. (2.) It is not *necessary* as a proof-text. The doctrine which it contains can be abundantly established from other parts of the New Testament, by passages about which there can be no doubt. (3.) The removal of this text does nothing to weaken the evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity, or to modify that doctrine. As it was never used to shape the early belief of the Christian world on the subject, so its rejection, and its removal from the New Testament, will do nothing to modify that doctrine. The doctrine was embraced, and held, and successfully defended without it, and it can and will be so still.

8. *And there are three that bear witness in earth.* This is a part of the text, which, if the reasoning above is correct, is to be omitted. The genuine passage reads, (ver. 7,) 'For there are three that bear record, [or witness—

\* Et tamen etiam atque etiam sperare licet, si non autographum Joanneum, at alios vetustissimos codices Græcos, qui hanc perichoriam habeant, in oculis providentiæ divinæ foris adhuc latentes suo tempore productum iri.



8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit,<sup>a</sup> and

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 15.26; Ac. 2.2-4; 2 Co. 1.22.

the water,<sup>b</sup> and the blood:<sup>c</sup> and these three agree in one.

<sup>b</sup> 1Pe. 3.21.

<sup>c</sup> He. 12.12.

μαρτυροῦντες,] the Spirit, and the water, and the blood.' There is no reference to the fact that it is done 'in earth.' The phrase was introduced to correspond with what was said in the interpolated passage, that there are three that bear record 'in heaven.' ¶ *The Spirit.* Evidently the Holy Spirit. The assertion here is, that that Spirit bears witness to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, ver. 5. The testimony of the Holy Ghost to this fact is contained in the following things: (1.) He did it at the baptism of Jesus. Notes, Matt. iii. 16, 17. (2.) Christ was eminently endowed with the influences of the Holy Spirit; as it was predicted that the Messiah would be, and as it was appropriate he should be, Isa. xi. 2; lxi. 1. Compare Luke iv. 18; Notes, John iii. 34. (3.) The Holy Spirit bore witness to his Messiahship, after his ascension, by descending, according to his promise, on his apostles, and by accompanying the message which they delivered with saving power to thousands in Jerusalem, Acts ii. (4.) He still bears the same testimony on every revival of religion, and in the conversion of every individual who becomes a Christian, convincing them that Jesus is the Son of God. Comp. John xvi. 14, 15. (5.) He does it in the hearts of all true Christians, for 'no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost,' 1 Cor. xii. 3. See Notes on that passage. The Spirit of God has thus always borne witness to the fact that Jesus is the Christ, and he will continue to do it to the end of time, convincing yet countless millions that he was sent from God to redeem and save lost men. ¶ *And the water.* See Notes, ver. 6. That is, the baptism of Jesus, and the scenes which occurred when he was baptized, furnished evidence that he was the Messiah. This was done in these ways: (1.) It was proper that the Messiah should be baptized when he entered on his work, and perhaps it was expected; and the fact that he was baptized showed that he had *in fact* entered on his work as

Redeemer. See Notes, Matt. iii. 15. (2.) An undoubted attestation was then furnished to the fact that he was 'the Son of God,' by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and by the voice that addressed him from heaven, Matt. iii. 16, 17. (3.) His baptism with water was an emblem of the purity of his own character, and of the nature of his religion. (4.) Perhaps it may be implied here, also, that water used in baptism now bears witness to the same thing, (a), as it is the ordinance appointed by the Saviour; (b) as it keeps up his religion in the world; (c) as it is a public symbol of the purity of his religion; (d) and as, in every case where it is administered, it is connected with the public expression of a belief that Jesus is the Son of God. ¶ *And the blood.* There is undoubted allusion here to the blood shed on the cross; and the meaning is, that that blood bore witness also to the fact that he was the Son of God. This it did in the following respects: (1.) The shedding of the blood showed that he was truly dead—that his work was complete—that he died in *reality*, and not in *appearance* only. See Notes, John xix. 34, 35. (2.) The remarkable circumstances that attended the shedding of this blood—the darkened sun, the earthquake, the rending of the veil of the temple—showed in a manner that convinced even the Roman centurion that he was the Son of God. See Notes, Matt. xxvii. 54. (3.) The fact that an *atonement* was thus made for sin was an important 'witness' for the Saviour, showing that he had done that which the Son of God only could do, by disclosing a way by which the sinner may be pardoned, and the polluted soul be made pure. (4.) Perhaps, also, there may be here an allusion to the Lord's Supper, as designed to set forth the shedding of this blood; and the apostle may mean to have it implied that the representation of the shedding of the blood in this ordinance is intended to keep up the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God. If so, then the general

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God, which he hath testified of his Son.

10 He that believeth on the Son

of God hath the witness<sup>a</sup> in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

<sup>a</sup> Ro. 8.16.

sense is, that that blood—however set before the eyes and the hearts of men—on the cross, or by the representation of its shedding in the Lord's Supper—is a witness in the world to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, and to the nature of his religion. Comp. Notes, 1 Cor. xi. 26. ¶ *And these three agree in one. σὺς τὸ ὅτι σὺς.* They agree in one thing; they bear on one and the same point, to wit, the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. All are appointed by God as witnesses of this fact; and all harmonize in the testimony which is borne. The apostle does not say that there are no other witnesses to the same thing; nor does he even say that these are the most important or decisive which have been furnished; but he says that these *are* important witnesses, and are entirely harmonious in their testimony.

9. *If we receive the witness of men.* As we are accustomed to do, and as we must do in courts of justice, and in the ordinary daily transactions of life. We are constantly acting on the belief that what others say is true; that what the members of our families, and our neighbours say, is true; that what is reported by travellers is true; that what we read in books, and what is sworn to in courts of justice, is true. We could not get along a single day if we did not act on this belief; nor are we accustomed to call it in question, unless we have reason to suspect that it is false. The mind is so made that it must credit the testimony borne by others; and if this should cease even for a single day, the affairs of the world would come to a pause. ¶ *The witness of God is greater.* Is more worthy of belief; as God is more true, and wise, and good than men. Men may be deceived, and may undesignedly bear witness to that which is not true—God never can be; men may, for sinister and base purposes, intend to deceive—God never can; men may act from partial observation, from rumours unworthy of credence—God never can;

men may desire to excite admiration by the marvellous—God never can; men have deceived—God never has; and though, from these causes, there are many instances where we are not certain that the testimony borne by men is true, yet we are always certain that that which is borne by God is not false. The only question on which the mind ever hesitates is, whether we actually *have* his testimony, or certainly *know* what he bears witness to; when that is ascertained, the human mind is so made that it *cannot* believe that God would deliberately deceive a world. See Notes, Heb. vi. 18. Comp. Titus i. 2. ¶ *For this is the witness of God, &c.* The testimony above referred to—that borne by the Spirit, and the water, and the blood. Who that saw his baptism, and heard the voice from heaven, (Matt. iii. 16, 17,) could doubt that he was the Son of God? Who that saw his death on the cross, and that witnessed the amazing scenes which occurred there, could fail to join with the Roman centurion in saying that this was the Son of God? Who that has felt the influences of the Eternal Spirit on his heart, ever doubted that Jesus was the Son of God? Comp. Notes, 1 Cor. xii. 3. Any one of these is sufficient to convince the soul of this; all combined bear on the same point, and confirm it from age to age.

10. *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.* The evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. Comp. Notes, Rom. viii. 16. This cannot refer to any distinct and immediate *revelation* of that fact, that Jesus is the Christ, to the soul of the individual, and is not to be understood as independent of the external evidence of that truth, or as superseding the necessity of that evidence; but the 'witness' here referred to is the fruit of *all* the evidence, external and internal, on the heart, producing this result; that is, there is the deepest conviction of the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. There is the evi-

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life<sup>a</sup> is in his Son.

12 He<sup>b</sup> that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.

<sup>a</sup> Jn. 1.4.

<sup>b</sup> Jn. 5.24.

dence derived from the fact that the soul has found peace by believing on him; from the fact that the troubles and anxieties of the mind on account of sin have been removed by faith in Christ; from the new views of God and heaven which have resulted from faith in the Lord Jesus; from the effect of this in disarming death of its terrors; and from the whole influence of the gospel on the intellect and the affections—on the heart and the life. These things constitute a mass of evidence for the truth of the Christian religion, whose force the believer cannot resist, and make the sincere Christian ready to sacrifice anything rather than his religion; ready to go to the stake rather than to renounce his Saviour. Comp. Notes, 1 Pet. iii. 15. ¶ *He that believeth not God hath made him a liar.* Comp. Notes, chap. i. 10. ¶ *Because he believeth not the record, &c.* The idea is, that in various ways—at his baptism, at his death, by the influences of the Holy Spirit, by the miracles of Jesus, &c.—God had become a witness that the Lord Jesus was sent by him as a Saviour, and that to doubt or deny this partook of the same character as doubting or denying any other testimony; that is, it was practically charging him who bore the testimony with falsehood.

11. *And this is the record.* This is the sum, or the amount, of the testimony (*μαρτυρία*) which God has given respecting him. ¶ *That God hath given to us eternal life.* Has provided, through the Saviour, the means of obtaining eternal life. See Notes, John v. 24; xvii. 2, 3. ¶ *And this life is in his Son.* Is treasured up in him, or is to be obtained through him. See Notes, John i. 4; xi. 25; xiv. 6; Col. iii. 3.

12. *He that hath the Son, hath life.* See Notes, John v. 24. John evidently designs to refer to that passage in the verse before us, and to state a principle

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye<sup>c</sup> may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

<sup>c</sup> Jn. 20.31.

laid down by the Saviour himself. This is the sense of all the important testimony that had ever been borne by God on the subject of salvation, that he who believes in the Lord Jesus already has the elements of eternal life in his soul, and will certainly obtain salvation. Comp. Notes, John xvii. 3. ¶ *And he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.* He that does not believe on him will not attain to eternal life. See Notes, John iii. 36; Mark xvi. 16.

13. *These things have I written unto you.* The things in this epistle respecting the testimony borne to the Lord Jesus. ¶ *That believe on the name of the Son of God.* To believe on his name, is to believe on himself—the word name often being used to denote the person. See Notes, Matt. xxviii. 19. ¶ *That ye may know that ye have eternal life.* That you may see the evidence that eternal life has been provided, and that you may be able, by self-examination, to determine whether you possess it. Comp. Notes, John xx. 31. ¶ *And that ye may believe, &c.* That you may continue to believe, or may persevere in believing. He was assured that they actually did believe on him then; but he was desirous of so setting before them the nature of religion, that they would continue to exercise faith in him. It is often one of the most important duties of ministers of the gospel, to present to real Christians such views of the nature, the claims, the evidences, and the hopes of religion, as shall be adapted to secure their perseverance in the faith. In the human heart, even when converted, there is such a proneness to unbelief; the religious affections so easily become cold; there are so many cares pertaining to the world that are fitted to distract the mind; there are so many allurements of sin to draw the affections away from the Saviour; that there is need of being constantly reminded of the nature of re-

14 And this is the confidence that we have <sup>1</sup>in him, that, if we

<sup>1</sup> concerning.

ligion, in order that the heart may not be wholly estranged from the Saviour. No small part of preaching, therefore, must consist of the re-statement of arguments with which the mind has been before fully convinced; of motives whose force has been once felt and acknowledged; and of the grounds of hope and peace and joy which have already, on former occasions, diffused comfort through the soul. It is not less important to *keep* the soul, than it is to *convert* it; to save it from coldness, and deadness, and formality, than it was to impart to it the elements of spiritual life at first. It may be as important to trim a vine, if one would have grapes, as it is to set it out; to keep a garden from being overrun with weeds in the summer, as it was to plant it in the spring.

14. *And this is the confidence that we have in him.* Marg., *concerning*. Greek, 'towards him,' or in respect to him—*πρὸς αὐτὸν*. The confidence referred to here is that which relates to the answer to prayer. The apostle does not say that this is the *only* thing in respect to which there is to be confidence in him, but that it is one which is worthy of special consideration. The sense is, that one of the effects of believing on the Lord Jesus (ver. 13) is, that we have the assurance that our prayers will be answered. On the word *confidence*, see Notes on chap. iii. 21; iv. 17. ¶ *That, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.* This is the proper and the necessary limitation in all prayer. God has not promised to grant anything that shall be contrary to his will, and it could not be right that he should do it. We ought not to wish to receive anything that should be contrary to what he judges to be best. No man could hope for good who should esteem his own wishes to be a better guide than the will of God; and it is one of the most desirable of all arrangements that the promise of any blessing to be obtained by prayer should be limited and bounded by the will of God. The limitation here, 'according to his will,' probably implies the following things: (1.) In accordance

ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

with what he has *declared* that he is willing to grant. Here the range is large, for there are many things which we know to be in accordance with his will, if they are sought in a proper manner—as the forgiveness of sins, the sanctification of the soul, (1 Thess. iv. 3,) comfort in trial, the needful supply of our wants, grace that we may do our duty, wisdom to direct and guide us, (James i. 5,) deliverance from the evils which beset us, the influences of his Spirit to promote the cause of religion in the world, and our final salvation. Here is a range of subjects of petition that may gratify the largest wishes of prayer. (2.) The expression, 'according to his will,' must limit the answer to prayer to what *he* sees to be best for us. Of that we are not always good judges. We never perceive it as clearly as our Maker does, and in many things we might be wholly mistaken. Certainly we ought not to desire to be permitted to ask anything which *God* would judge not to be for our good. (3.) The expression must limit the petition to what it will be *consistent* for God to bestow upon us. We cannot expect that he will work a miracle in answer to our prayers; we cannot ask him to bestow blessings in violation of any of the laws which he has ordained, or in any other way than that which he has appointed. It is better that the particular blessing should be withheld from us, than that the laws which he has appointed should be disregarded. It is better that an idle man should *not* have a harvest, though he should pray for it, than that God should violate the laws by which he has determined to bestow such favours as a reward of industry, and work a special miracle in answer to a lazy man's prayers. (4.) The expression, 'according to his will,' must limit the promise to what will be *for the good of the whole*. God presides over the universe: and though in him there is an infinite fulness, and he regards the wants of every individual throughout his immense empire, yet the interests of the whole, as well as of the individual, are to be consulted and re-

15 And if we know <sup>a</sup> that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin *which* is not unto death,

he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death : <sup>b</sup> I do not say <sup>c</sup> that he shall pray for it.

<sup>a</sup> Pr. 15.29; Jer. 29.12, 13.    <sup>b</sup> Mat. 12.31, 32.    <sup>c</sup> Jer. 7.16.

garded. In a family, it is conceivable that a child might ask for some favour whose bestowment would interfere materially with the rights of others, or be inconsistent with the good of the whole, and in such a case a just father would of course withhold it. With these necessary limitations the range of the promise in prayer is ample; and, with these limitations, it is true beyond a question that he does hear and answer prayer.

15. *And if we know that he hear us.* That is, if we are assured of this as a true doctrine, then, even though we may not *see* immediately that the prayer is answered, we may have the utmost confidence that it is not disregarded, and that it will be answered in the way best adapted to promote our good. The specific thing that we asked may not indeed be granted, (comp. Luke xxii. 42; 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9,) but the prayer will not be disregarded, and the thing which is most for our good will be bestowed upon us. The *argument* here is derived from the faithfulness of God; from the assurance which we feel that when he has promised to hear us, there will be, sooner or later, a *real* answer to the prayer. ¶ *We know that we have the petitions, &c.* That is, evidently, we know that we *shall* have them, or that the prayer will be answered. It cannot mean that we already have the precise thing for which we prayed, or that will be a real answer to the prayer, for (a) the prayer may relate to something future, as protection on a journey, or a harvest, or restoration to health, or the safe return of a son from a voyage at sea, or the salvation of our souls—all of which are *future*, and which cannot be expected to be granted at once; and (b) the answer to prayer is sometimes delayed, though ultimately granted. There may be reasons why the answer should be deferred, and the promise is not that it shall be immediate. The *delay* may arise from such causes as these: (1.)

To try our faith, and see whether the blessing is earnestly desired. (2.) Perhaps it could not be at once answered without a miracle. (3.) It might not be consistent with the Divine arrangements respecting others to grant it to us at once. (4.) Our own condition may not be such that it would be best to answer it at once. We may need further trial, further chastisement, before the affliction, for example, shall be removed; and the answer to the prayer may be delayed for months or years. Yet, in the meantime, we may have the firmest assurance that the prayer *is* heard, and that it *will* be answered in the way and at the period when God shall see it to be best.

16. *If a man see his brother sin a sin, &c.* From the general assurance that God hears prayer, the apostle turns to a particular case in which it may be benevolently and effectually employed, in rescuing a brother from death. There has been great diversity of opinion in regard to the meaning of this passage, and the views of expositors of the New Testament are by no means settled as to its true sense. It does not comport with the design of these Notes to examine the opinions which have been held in detail. A bare reference, however, to some of them will show the difficulty of determining with certainty what the passage means, and the impropriety of any very great confidence in one's own judgment in the case. Among these opinions are the following. Some have supposed that the sin against the Holy Ghost is intended; some that the phrase denotes any great and enormous sin, as murder, idolatry, adultery; some that it denotes some sin that was punishable by death by the laws of Moses; some that it denotes a sin that subjected the offender to excommunication from the synagogue or the church; some that it refers to sins which brought fatal disease upon the offender, as in the case

of those who abused the Lord's Supper at Corinth, (see Notes on 1 Cor. xi. 30;) some that it refers to crimes committed against the laws, for which the offender was sentenced to death, meaning that when the charge alleged was false, and the condemnation unjust, they ought to pray for the one who was condemned to death, and that he would be spared; but that when the offence was one which had been really committed, and the offender deserved to die, they ought not to pray for him, or, in other words, that by 'the sin unto death,' offences against the civil law are referred to, which the magistrate had no power to pardon, and the punishment of which he could not commute; and by the 'sin not unto death,' offences are referred to which might be pardoned, and when the punishment might be commuted; some that it refers to sins *before* and *after* baptism, the former of which might be pardoned, but the latter of which might not be; and some, and perhaps this is the common opinion among the Roman Catholics, that it refers to sins that might or might not be pardoned *after* death, thus referring to the doctrine of purgatory. These various opinions may be seen stated more at length in Rosenmüller, Lücke, Pool, (*Synopsis*,) and Clarke, *in loc.* To go into an examination of all these opinions would require a volume by itself, and all that can be done here is to furnish what seems to me to be the fair exposition of the passage. The word *brother* may refer either to a member of the church, whether of the particular church to which one was attached or to another, or it may be used in the larger sense which is common as denoting a fellow-man, a member of the great family of mankind. There is nothing in the word which necessarily limits it to one in the church; there is nothing in the connection, or in the reason assigned, why what is said should be limited to such an one. The *duty* here enjoined would be the same whether the person referred to was in the church or not; for it is our duty to pray for those who sin, and to seek the salvation of those whom we see to be going astray, and to be in danger of ruin, wherever they are, or whoever they may be. At the same time, the correct interpretation

of the passage does not depend on determining whether the word *brother* refers to one who is a professed Christian or not.

¶ *A sin which is not unto death.*

The great question in the interpretation of the whole passage is, what is meant by the 'sin unto death.' The Greek (*ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον*) would mean properly a sin which *tends* to death; which would *terminate* in death; of which death was the penalty, or would be the result, unless it were arrested; a sin which, if it had its own course, would terminate thus, as we should speak of a disease 'unto death.' Comp. Notes, John xi. 4. The word *death* is used in three significations in the New Testament, and as employed here might, so far as the *word* is concerned, be applied in any one of those senses. It is used to denote (a) literally the death of the body; (b) spiritual death, or death 'in trespasses and sin,' Eph. ii. 1; (c) the 'second death,' death in the world of woe and despair. If the sin here mentioned refers to *temporal* death, it means such a sin that temporal death *must* inevitably follow, either by the *disease* which it has produced, or by a judicial sentence where there was no hope of pardon or of a commutation of the punishment; if it refers to death in the future world, the second death, then it means such a sin as is unpardonable. That this last is the reference here seems to me to be probable, if not clear, from the following considerations: (1.) There *is* such a sin referred to in the New Testament, a sin for which there is forgiveness 'neither in this life nor the life to come.' See Notes, Matt. xii. 31, 32. Comp. Mark iii. 29. If there *is* such a sin, there is no impropriety in supposing that John would refer to it here. (2.) This is the *obvious* interpretation. It is that which would occur to the mass of the readers of the New Testament, and which it is presumed they do adopt; and this, in general, is one of the best means of ascertaining the sense of a passage in the Bible. (3.) The other significations attached to the word *death*, would be quite inappropriate here. (a) It cannot mean 'unto *spiritual* death,' that is, to a continuance in sin, for how could

that be known? and if such a case occurred, why would it be improper to pray for it? Besides, the phrase 'a sin unto spiritual death,' or 'unto continuance in sin,' is one that is unmeaning. (b) It cannot be shown to refer to a disease that should be unto death, miraculously inflicted on account of sin, because, if such cases occurred, they were very rare, and even if a disease came upon a man miraculously in consequence of sin, it could not be certainly known whether it was, or was not, unto death. All who were visited in this way did not certainly die. Comp. 1 Cor. v. 4, 5, with 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7. See also 1 Cor. xi. 30. (c) It cannot be shown that it refers to the case of those who were condemned by the civil magistrate to death, and for whom there was no hope of reprieve or pardon, for it is not certain that there were such cases; and if there were, and the person condemned were innocent, there was every reason to pray that *God* would interpose and save them, even when there was no hope from man; and if they were guilty, and deserved to die, there was no reason why they should not pray that the sin might be forgiven, and that they might be prepared to die, unless it were a case where the sin was unpardonable. It seems probable, therefore, to me, that the reference here is to the sin against the Holy Ghost, and that John means here to illustrate the duty and the power of prayer, by showing that for *any sin short of that*, however aggravated, it was their duty to pray that a brother might be forgiven. Though it might not be easy to determine what *was* the unpardonable sin, and John does not say that those to whom he wrote could determine that with certainty, yet there were many sins which were manifestly *not* of that aggravated character, and for those sins it was proper to pray. There was clearly but *one* sin that was unpardonable — 'there is a sin unto death;' there might be many which were not of this description, and in relation to them there was ample scope for the exercise of the prayer of faith. The same thing is true now. It is not easy to define the unpardonable sin, and it is impossible for us to determine in any case with absolute certainty that a man

has committed it. But there are multitudes of sins which men commit, which on no proper interpretation of the passages respecting the sin which 'hath never forgiveness,' can come under the description of that sin, and for which it is proper, therefore, to pray that they may be pardoned. We know of cases enough where sin *may* be forgiven; and, without allowing the mind to be disturbed about the question respecting the unpardonable sin, it is our duty to bear such cases on our hearts before God, and to plead with him that our erring brethren may be saved. ¶ *He shall ask.* That is, he shall pray that the offender may be brought to true repentance, and may be saved. ¶ *And he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.* That is, *God* shall give life, and he shall be saved from the eternal death to which he was exposed. This, it is said, would be given to 'him' who offers the prayer; that is, his prayer would be the means of saving the offending brother. What a motive is this to prayer! How faithful and constant should we be in pleading for our fellow-sinners, that we may be instrumental in saving their souls! What joy will await those in heaven who shall see there many who were rescued from ruin in answer to their prayers! Comp. Notes, James v. 15, 19, 20. ¶ *There is a sin unto death.* A sin which is of such a character that it throws the offender beyond the reach of mercy, and which is not to be pardoned. See Mark iii. 28, 29. The apostle does not here say what that sin is; nor how they might know what it is; nor even that in any case they could determine that it had been committed. He merely says that *there is* such a sin, and that he does not design that his remark about the efficacy of prayer should be understood as extending to that. ¶ *I do not say that he shall pray for it.* 'I do not intend that my remark shall be extended to *all* sin, or mean to affirm that all possible forms of guilt are the proper subjects of prayer, for I am aware that there is one sin which is an exception, and my remark is not to be applied to that.' He does not say that this sin was of common occurrence: or that they could know when it had been committed; or even that a case could ever occur in

17 All unrighteousness <sup>a</sup> is sin : and there <sup>b</sup> is a sin not unto death.

18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not ; but he

that is begotten of God keepeth himself, <sup>c</sup> and that wicked one toucheth him not.

<sup>a</sup> 1 Jn. 3.4.

<sup>b</sup> Ro. 5.20, 21.

<sup>c</sup> Ja. 1.27.

which they could determine that ; he merely says that in respect to that sin he did *not* say that prayer should be offered. It is indeed implied in a most delicate way that it would not be proper to pray for the forgiveness of such a sin, but he does not say that a case would ever happen in which they would *know* certainly that the sin had been committed. There were instances in the times of the prophets in which the sin of the people became so universal and so aggravated, that they were forbidden to pray for them. Isa. xiv. 11, 'Then said the Lord unto me, Pray not for this people for their good ;' xv. 1, 'Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people ; cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.' Comp. Notes, Isa. i. 15. But these were cases in which the prophets were directly instructed by God not to pray for a people. We have no such instruction ; and it may be said now with truth, that as we can never be certain respecting any one that he has committed the unpardonable sin, there is no one for whom we may not with propriety pray. There may be those who are so far gone in sin that there may seem to be little, or almost no ground of hope. They may have cast off all the restraints of religion, of morality, of decency ; they may disregard all the counsels of parents and friends ; they may be sceptical, sensual, profane ; they may be the companions of infidels and of mockers ; they may have forsaken the sanctuary, and learned to despise the sabbath ; they may have been professors of religion, and now may have renounced the faith of the gospel altogether, but still, while there is life it is our duty to pray for them, 'if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth,' 2 Tim. ii. 25. '*All things* are possible with God ;' and he has reclaimed offenders more hardened, probably, than any that we have known, and has demonstrated that there is no form of depravity which he has not the power to subdue. Let

us remember the cases of Manasseh, of Saul of Tarsus, of Augustine, of Bunyan, of Newton, of tens of thousands who have been reclaimed from the vilest forms of iniquity, and then let us never despair of the conversion of any, in answer to prayer, who may have gone astray, as long as they are in this world of probation and of hope. Let no parent despair who has an abandoned son ; let no wife cease to pray who has a dissipated husband. How many a prodigal son has come back to fill with happiness an aged parent's heart ! How many a dissipated husband has been reformed to give joy again to the wife of his youth, and to make a paradise again of his miserable home !

17. *All unrighteousness is sin, &c.* This seems to be thrown in to guard what he had just said, and there is *one* great and enormous sin, a sin which could not be forgiven. But he says also that there are many other forms and degrees of sin, sin for which prayer may be made. Everything, he says, which is *unrighteous* — *ἀδικία* — everything which does not conform to the holy law of God, and which is not *right* in the view of that law, is to be regarded as sin ; but we are not to suppose that *all* sin of that kind is of such a character that it cannot possibly be forgiven. There are many who commit sin who we may hope will be recovered, and for them it is proper to pray. Deeply affected as we may be in view of the fact that there is a sin which can never be pardoned, and much as we may pity one who has been guilty of such a sin, yet we should not hastily conclude in any case that it has been committed, and should bear constantly in mind that while there is one such sin, there are multitudes that may be pardoned, and that for them it is our duty unceasingly to pray.

18. *We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not.* Is not habitually and characteristically a sinner ; does not ultimately and finally sin and perish ; cannot, therefore, commit the unpar-



19 *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*

20 *And we know that the Son of*

*God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true: and we are in*

*α Lu. 24.45.*

donable sin. Though he may fall into sin, and grieve his brethren, yet we are never to cease to pray for a true Christian; we are never to feel that he has committed the sin which has never forgiveness, and that he has thrown himself beyond the reach of our prayers. This passage, in its connection, is a full proof that a true Christian *will* never commit the unpardonable sin, and, therefore, is a proof that he will never fall from grace. Comp. Notes, Heb. vi. 4-8; x. 26. On the *meaning* of the assertion here made, that 'whosoever is born of God sinneth not,' see Notes on chap. iii. 6-9. ¶ *Keepeth himself.* It is not said that he does it by his own strength, but he will put forth his best efforts to keep himself from sin, and by Divine assistance he will be able to accomplish it. Comp. Notes on chap. iii. 3; Jude 21. ¶ *And that wicked one toucheth him not.* The great enemy of all good is repelled in his assaults, and he is kept from falling into his snares. The word *toucheth* (*ἅρτεται*) is used here in the sense of *harm or injure.*

19. *And we know that we are of God.* We who are Christians. The apostle supposed that true Christians might have so clear evidence on that subject as to leave no doubt on their own minds that they were the children of God. Comp. chap. iii. 14; 2 Tim. i. 12. ¶ *And the whole world.* The term *world* here evidently means not the *material* world, but the *people* that dwell on the earth, including all idolaters, and all sinners of every grade and kind. ¶ *Lieth in wickedness.* 'In the wicked one,' or under the power of the wicked one—*ἐν τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ*. It is true that the word *ἁμαρτωλῷ* may be used here in the neuter gender, as our translators have rendered it, meaning 'in that which is evil,' or in 'wickedness;' but it may be in the masculine gender, meaning 'the wicked one;' and then the sense would be that the whole world is under his control or dominion. That this is the meaning of the apostle seems to be clear, because

(1) the corresponding phrase, (ver. 20,) *ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ*, 'in him that is true,' is evidently to be construed in the masculine, referring to God the Saviour, and meaning 'him that is true,' and not that we are 'in truth.' (2.) It makes better sense to say that the world lies under the control of the wicked one, than to say that it lies 'in wickedness.' (3.) This accords better with the other representations in the Bible, and the usage of the word elsewhere. Comp. 1 John ii. 13, 'Ye have overcome the *wicked one*;' ver. 14, 'ye have overcome the *wicked one*;' iii. 12, 'who was of that *wicked one*.' See also Notes, 2 Cor. iv. 4, on the expression 'the god of this world;' John xii. 31, where he is called 'the prince of this world;' and Eph. ii. 2, where he is called 'the prince of the power of the air.' In all these passages it is supposed that Satan has control over the world, especially the heathen world. Comp. Eph. vi. 12; 1 Cor. x. 20. In regard to the *fact* that the heathen world was pervaded by wickedness, see Notes on Rom. i. 21-32. (4.) It may be added, that this interpretation is adopted by the most eminent critics and commentators. It is that of Calvin, Beza, Benson, Macknight, Bloomfield, Piscator, Lücke, &c. The word *lieth* here (*καίεται*) means, properly, to lie; to be laid; to recline; to be situated, &c. It seems here to refer to the *passive* and *torpid* state of a wicked world under the dominion of the prince of evil, as acquiescing in his reign; making no resistance; not even struggling to be free. It *lies* thus as a beast that is subdued, a body that is dead, or anything that is wholly passive, quiet, and inert. There is no energy; no effort to throw off the reign; no resistance; no struggling. The dominion is complete, and body and soul, individuals and nations, are entirely subject to his will. This striking expression will not unaptly now describe the condition of the heathen world, or of sinners in general. There would seem to be no government under which men are so little restive, and against which

him that is true, *even* in his Son

a 1s.9.6.

they have so little disposition to rebel, as that of Satan. Comp. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

20. *And we know that the Son of God is come.* We know this by the evidence that John had referred to in this epistle, chap. i. 1-4; v. 6-8. ¶ *And hath given us an understanding.* Not an 'understanding' considered as a faculty of the mind, for religion gives us no new faculties; but he has so instructed us that we do understand the great truths referred to. Comp. Notes, Luke xxiv. 45. All the correct *knowledge* which we have of God and his government, is to be traced directly or indirectly to the great Prophet whom God has sent into the world, John i. 4, 18; viii. 12; ix. 5; Heb. i. 1-3; Matt. xi. 27. ¶ *That we may know him that is true.* That is, the true God. See Notes, John xvii. 3. ¶ *And we are in him that is true.* That is, we are united to him; we belong to him; we are his friends. This idea is often expressed in the Scriptures by being '*in him*.' It denotes a most intimate union, *as if* we were one with him—or were a *part* of him—as the branch is *in* the vine, John xv. 4, 6. The Greek construction is the same as that applied to 'the wicked one,' ver. 19, (ἰν τῷ ἀρχηγῷ.) ¶ *This is the true God.\** There has been much difference of opinion in regard to this important passage; whether it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, the immediate antecedent, or to a more remote antecedent—referring to God, as such. The question is of importance in its bearing on the doctrine of the divinity of the Saviour; for if it refers to him, it furnishes an unequivocal declaration that he is Divine. The question is, whether John meant that it should be referred to him? Without going into an extended ex-

Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

amination of the passage, the following considerations seem to me to make it morally certain that by the phrase 'this is the true God,' &c., he did refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. (1.) The grammatical construction favours it. Christ is the immediate antecedent of the pronoun *this*—ὁτός. This would be regarded as the obvious and certain construction so far as the grammar is concerned, unless there were something in the thing affirmed which led us to seek some more remote and less obvious antecedent. No doubt would have been ever entertained on this point, if it had not been for the reluctance to admit that the Lord Jesus is the true God. If the assertion had been that '*this* is the true Messiah;' or that '*this* is the Son of God;' or that '*this* is he who was born of the Virgin Mary,' there would have been no difficulty in the construction. I admit that this argument is not absolutely decisive; for cases do occur where a pronoun refers, not to the immediate antecedent, but to one more remote; but cases of that kind depend on the ground of necessity, and can be applied only when it would be a clear violation of the sense of the author to refer it to the immediate antecedent. (2.) This construction seems to be demanded by the adjunct which John has assigned to the phrase 'the true God'—'*ETERNAL LIFE*.' This is an expression which John would be likely to apply to the Lord Jesus, considered as *life*, and the *source of life*, and not to God as such. 'How familiar is this language with John, as applied to Christ! "In him (i. e. Christ) was *LIFE*, and the *LIFE* was the light of men—giving *LIFE* to the world—the bread of *LIFE*—my words are spirit and *LIFE*—I am the way, and the truth, and the *LIFE*. This *LIFE* (Christ) was manifested, and we have seen it, and do testify to you, and declare the *ETERNAL LIFE* which was with the Father, and was manifested to us," 1 John i. 2.'—Prof. Stuart's Letters to Dr. Channing, p. 83. There is no instance in the writings of John, in which the appellation *LIFE*, and *eternal LIFE* is bestowed upon the Father, to designate him as the author of spiritual

\* Many mss. here insert the word *God*—'the true God'—τὸν ἀληθινόν Θεόν. This is also found in the Vulgate, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, and in the Complutensian edition of the New Testament. The reading, however, is not so well sustained as to be adopted by Griesbach, Tittman, or Hahn. That it may be a genuine reading is indeed possible, but the evidence is against it. Lücke supposes that it is genuine, and endeavours to account for the manner in which it was omitted in the mss.—*Commentary*, p. 349.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. <sup>a</sup> Amen.

p 1 Co. 10. 14.

and eternal life; and as this occurs so frequently in John's writings as applied to Christ, the laws of exegesis require that both the phrase 'the true God,' and 'eternal life,' should be applied to him. (3.) If it refers to God as such, or to the word 'true'—*ὁὖν ἀληθινόν* [*Θεόν*] it would be mere tautology, or a mere truism. The rendering would then be, 'That we may know the *true* God, and we are in the *true* God: this *is* the true God, and eternal life.' Can we believe that an inspired man would affirm gravely, and with so much solemnity, and as if it were a truth of so much magnitude, that the true God *is* the true God? (4.) This interpretation accords with what we are sure John *would* affirm respecting the Lord Jesus Christ. Can there be any doubt that he who said, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;' that he who said, 'all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made;' that he who recorded the declaration of the Saviour, 'I and my Father are one,' and the declaration of Thomas, 'my Lord and my God,' would apply to him the appellation *the true God*? (5.) If John did *not* mean to affirm this, he has made use of an expression which was liable to be misunderstood, and which, as facts have shown, would be misconstrued by the great portion of those who might read what he had written; and, moreover, an expression that would lead to the *very* sin against which he endeavours to guard in the next verse—the sin of substituting a creature in the place of God, and rendering to another the honour due to him. The language which he uses is just such as, according to its natural interpretation, would lead men to worship one as the true God who is *not* the true God, unless the Lord Jesus be Divine. For these reasons, it seems to me that the fair interpretation of this passage demands that it should be understood as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. If so, it is a direct assertion of his divinity, for there could be no higher proof of it than to affirm that he is the true God.

¶ *And eternal life.* Having 'life in himself,' (John v. 26,) and the source and fountain of life to the soul. No more frequent appellation, perhaps, is given to the Saviour by John, than that he is life, and the source of life. Comp. John i. 4; v. 26, 40; x. 10; vi. 33, 35, 48, 51, 53, 63; xi. 25; xiv. 6; xx. 31; 1 John i. 1, 2; v. 12.

21. *Little children.* This is a favourite mode of address with John, (see Notes on chap. ii. 1,) and it was proper to use it in giving his parting counsel; embracing, in fact, all that he had to say—that they should keep themselves from idols, and suffer nothing to alienate their affections from the true God. His great object had been to lead them to the knowledge and love of God, and all his counsels would be practically followed, if, amidst the temptations of idolatry, and the allurements of sin, nothing were allowed to estrange their hearts from him. ¶ *Keep yourselves from idols.* From worshipping them; from all that would imply communion with them or their devotees. Compare Notes, 1 Cor. x. 14. The word rendered *idols* here (*ειδώλων*) means, properly, an image, spectre, shade—as of the dead; then any image or figure which would represent anything, particularly anything invisible; and hence anything designed to represent God, and that was set up with a view to be acknowledged as representing him, or to bring him, or his perfections, more vividly before the mind. The word is applicable to idol-gods—heathen deities, 1 Cor. viii. 4, 7; x. 19; Rom. ii. 22; 2 Cor. vi. 16; 1 Thess. i. 9; but it would, also, be applicable to any *image* designed to represent the true God, and through or by which the true God was to be adored. The essential things in the word seem to be, (a,) an image or representation of the Deity, and (b) the making of that an object of adoration instead of the true God. Since one of these things would be likely to lead to the other, both are forbidden in the prohibitions of idolatry, Exod. xx. 4, 5. This would forbid all attempts to represent God by paintings or statuary; all idol-worship, or worship of heathen

gods ; all images and pictures that would be substituted in the place of God as objects of devotion, or that might transfer the homage from God to the image ; and all giving of those affections to other beings or objects which are due to God. *Why* the apostle closed this epistle with this injunction he has not stated, and it may not be easy to determine. It may have been for such reasons as these : (1.) Those to whom he wrote were surrounded by idolaters, and there was danger that they might fall into the prevailing sin, or in some way so act as to be understood to lend their sanction to idolatry. (2.) In a world full of alluring objects, there was danger then, as there is at all times, that the affections should be fixed on other objects than the supreme God, and that what is due to him should be withheld. It may be added, in the conclusion of the exposition of this epistle, that the same caution is as needful for us as it was for those to whom John wrote. We are not in danger, indeed, of bowing down to idols, or of engaging in the grosser forms of idol-worship. But we may be in no less danger than they to whom John wrote were, of substituting other things in our affections in the place of the true God, and of devoting to them the time and the affection which are due to him. Our children it is possible to love with such an attachment as shall effectually exclude the true God from the heart. The world—its wealth, and pleasures, and honours—we may love with a degree of attachment such as

even an idolater would hardly shew to his idol-gods ; and all the time which he would take in performing his devotions in an idol-temple, we may devote with equal fervour to the service of the world. There is practical idolatry all over the world ; in nominally Christian lands as well as among the heathen ; in families that acknowledge no God but wealth and fashion ; in the hearts of multitudes of individuals who would scorn the thought of worshipping at a pagan altar ; and it is even to be found in the heart of many a one who professes to be acquainted with the true God, and to be an heir of heaven. God should have the supreme place in our affections. The love of everything else should be held in strict subordination to the love of him. He should reign in our hearts ; be acknowledged in our closets, our families, and in the place of public worship ; be submitted to at all times as having a right to command and control us ; be obeyed in all the expressions of his will, by his word, by his providence, and by his Spirit ; be so loved that we shall be willing to part without a murmur with the dearest object of affection when he takes it from us ; and so that, with joy and triumph, we shall welcome his messenger, *the angel of death*, when he shall come to summon us into his presence. To all who may read these illustrations of the epistle of the ‘beloved disciple,’ may God grant this inestimable blessing and honour. AMEN.